

REGULAR MEETING OF THE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Tuesday, June 9, 2015

Library, Amherst Regional High School

IN ATTENDANCE:

Trevor Baptiste, Chair
Kathleen Traphagen, Vice-Chair
Stephen Sullivan
Katherine Appy
Vira Douangmany Cage (arrived @ 6:11)
Phoebe Hazzard
Kip Fonsh
Rick Hood
Dan Robb
Josiah Vasquez, Student Representative

Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
Marisa Mendonsa, ARMS Principal
Mike Thompson, ARHS Assistant Principal
Jean Fay, APEA President
Laura Kent, SEPAC Advisory Board Member
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder
Public and Press

A. Welcome

6:03 PM

A. Call to Order and Agenda Review

Mr. Baptiste called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. and reviewed the agenda. It was agreed that the advocacy letter discussion will be moved to the beginning of the agenda.

B. Approve Minutes

Ms. Appy moved to approve the minutes of June 2, 2015. Ms. Hazzard seconded and discussion followed. Mr. Robb requested that a question and comments he made during the regionalization discussion be added, and Ms. Traphagen requested a correction to her comments about PAR, which were erroneously recorded. It was agreed that the minutes will be tabled until Ms. Westmoreland can make the corrections and will be brought back for reconsideration as the first agenda item on June 23.

2. Announcements and Public Comments

6:09 PM

Mr. Morris announced that Superintendent Geryk is not in attendance due to illness. He said she asked that he express her regrets for having to miss the meeting. Mr. Fonsh asked that the committee acknowledge the passing of two veteran teachers of the middle and high schools, George Steinmeyer and Gene Koehler. Mr. Baptiste thanked him and expressed condolences. Mr. Baptiste then distributed a report from Mr. Mangano on funds expended from the School Committee expense accounts in FY2015. He provided copies for members of the audience.

3. New and Continuing Business

6:12 PM

A. SEPAC Action Plan

DOCUMENT: Pelham, Amherst, Amherst-Regional Schools (PAARS) Special Education Advisory Council (SEPAC)
Laura Kent, SEPAC Executive Board member, gave a Powerpoint presentation outlining the mission of SEPAC; SEPAC's activities for 2014-2015; the APPLE Institute attended by SEPAC Executive Board members, Superintendent Geryk, Dr. Brady and Ms. Douangmany Cage; and the desire to have a School Committee Liaison to SEPAC. Dr. Brady acknowledged Ms. Kent and the other SEPAC Executive Board members for their great work, noting that having a parent group to advise the district is a real resource for families and for the district administrators. She noted that SEPAC often provides a bridge for families to access administrators. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked if SEPAC has found a home, which is part of their Action Plan. Ms. Kent noted that the same presentation will be made at tomorrow's District Instructional Leadership Team (DILT) meeting and the Executive Board will be discussing location possibilities with Superintendent Geryk. Dr. Brady reported that the STARS recognition mentioned in the presentation is scheduled for June 18 at 4:00 p.m. at Fort River. It will be followed by a SEPAC Book Club meeting at one of the SEPAC member's home. They will be reading and discussing *Look Me In the Eyes* by John Elder Robison, who will be attending the meeting. Mr. Baptiste expressed appreciation to the SEPAC for their work, noting that when the committee reorganizes a School Committee liaison can be appointed to work with SEPAC.

B. Advocacy Letter regarding High Stakes Testing

DOCUMENT: Draft Letter from Ms. Appy and Mr. Hood

Ms. Appy noted that she distributed a draft letter regarding high stakes testing for the Regional School Committee to consider at the last meeting. She reported that Mr. Hood is attending an advocacy day in Boston on Thursday where he would be able to present the letter if it is approved at tonight's meeting. Mr. Baptiste suggested adding references to some of the "multiple studies" referenced in the letter. He also suggested deleting the reference to "competition" among students. Mr. Hood noted that he believes the letter might be able to be improved; however, he feels it is more important that it be signed by everyone and presented on Thursday. He moved to approve the letter as presented. Mr. Robb seconded and discussion followed. Mr.

Fonsh noted that he would like to see a future advocacy letter with a reference to elimination of high stakes testing as a graduation requirement. After further discussion, Mr. Fonsh called the question, which was approved unanimously. The original motion to approve the letter as presented was then approved. Jean Fay, APEA President, reported that this letter will be read and presented at a hearing regarding HB340 at the State House on Thursday. She thanked Superintendent Geryk and Assistant Superintendent Morris for also writing letters in support of HB340.

C. Update on the ARMS/ARHS Schedule/Co-Teaching

DOCUMENT: ARHS Schedule Comparisons

Ms. Mendonsa utilized a Powerpoint presentation to provide an update on the change in the ARMS schedule. She outlined the rationale for the schedule change, which includes use of co-teaching. Ms. Mendonsa reported that today was the first of three days of professional development in co-teaching for elementary, middle and high school teachers. Dr. Brady reported that 30 pairs of teachers are being trained and today's training was a great beginning. Ms. Traphagen asked what percentage of the ARMS staff will be co-teaching. Ms. Mendonsa said it is 25% with co-teaching teams in social studies, ELA and math. She continued the update, reporting on professional development that will be provided regarding the instructional model; shared planning time for the co-teaching team; the climate team; the 1.0 arts integration teacher that will be put in place next year; the three new music courses that will be offered in addition to the current courses; the world language offerings for next year; Special Education offerings; and the changes to the advisory model. Mr. Fonsh asked what benchmark outcomes will be used to assess the progress of the co-teaching model. Dr. Brady reported that teachers in today's training were asked to complete a survey regarding their perceptions and they will be asked to rate their perceptions again next spring. Additionally there will focus group work with the teachers this year and again next year. Dr. Brady explained that specific student outcomes have not yet been identified because there are so many variables other than the co-teaching model that impact those outcomes. Mr. Morris noted that in the elementary schools that have co-teaching classes, there is a consistent trend of higher student growth when co-teaching is the instructional model. Ms. Hazzard asked for more information about the advisory lessons. Ms. Mendonsa reported that she had an administrative intern who took on the project of finding advisory lessons that pull on the ARMS core values. These lessons are organized by grade level and accessible to all teachers. A group of teachers will also volunteer to work on advisory lessons that are driven by events happening in the schools. Teachers will be able to access all of these resources and will also be able to use their own lessons. Mr. Robb asked what changes were made to the new ARMS schedule based on feedback received after the initial presentation of the schedule change in January. Ms. Mendonsa reported that an option was added for eighth grade students to opt into arts; one language will be offered for two quarters, rather than multiple languages; and she is working on having music teachers provide an additional block after school to provide instrumental music. Weekly coaching on the new instructional model will be provided for teachers.

Mr. Jackson and Mr. Thompson then provided an update on the ARHS schedule. Mr. Jackson provided background on the rationale for making a change from the trimester schedule, which will take place in 2016-2017. Mr. Thompson gave a presentation outlining the financial realities that impacted the decision, the process followed in determining the best schedule, and the schedules considered. He provided details about the schedule selected and distributed a document with information about the three schedules that were not chosen. Mr. Thompson noted that feedback gathered by surveys of families, students and faculty members informed the decision. He reported that all of the professional development time next year will be devoted to planning for the schedule change, with every faculty member and paraprofessional receiving approximately 22 hours of training. Mr. Sullivan expressed concern that the homework level will increase with an additional class added. Mr. Thompson noted that students cannot add another hour to their night and part of the discussions next year will be around how to deal with homework issues. Mr. Fonsh expressed his thanks for this change, which he believes is long overdue. He also expressed concern about the homework level and encouraged a review of how homework is used to enhance the educational experience. Mr. Robb asked where the schedule provides time for teachers to take a breath. Mr. Thompson noted that teachers will have the same overall prep time that they have now. Mr. Hood applauded the process used in the ARHS schedule change. He said that it was a model for any large change, particularly since they were open and honest about both the pros and cons throughout the process.

D. OPEB Trust

DOCUMENT: Memo to Maria Geryk, Superintendent, and the Amherst Pelham Regional School Committee from Sean Mangano, Director of Finance, regarding the OPEB Trust Agreement (dated June 9, 2015); page 2 of the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District OPEB Liability Trust containing Article II

Mr. Hood moved to amend the trust agreement (approved by the school committee on April 14, 2015) by replacing all occurrences of "APRSD School Committee" with "APRSD Budget and Finance Subcommittee" in article II. Mr. Robb seconded and discussion followed. Ms. Douangmany Cage expressed concern about appointing just the Budget and Finance Subcommittee as trustees, noting that the attorney suggested that the Board of Trustees can include community members and retirees. She noted that she did not vote to approve the OPEB Trust because she wants to focus funds on the needs of students. Mr. Fonsh noted that the Regional School Committee is a political entity so it would be problematic to appoint an

outside person from Amherst and not the other towns. He expressed his belief that this is the sole responsibility of the School Committee. Discussion followed regarding whether the Board of Trustees should include anyone other than School Committee members. After discussion, the motion was approved with Ms. Douangmany Cage abstaining and all other members voting in the affirmative.

E. Warrant Signing Committee

DOCUMENT: *Memo to the Amherst, Pelham and Regional School Committees from Sean Mangano, Finance Director, regarding Proposal to Establish Warrant Subcommittees for June 23 to August 31, 2015*

Mr. Hood moved to appoint a warrant sub-committee composed of the three members of the Regional School Committee authorized to review and sign off on payroll warrants and accounts payable warrants to allow for the release of checks, for the period June 23, 2015 through August 31, 2015. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Ms. Traphagen, Ms. Appy and Mr. Hood volunteered to serve and were approved by the committee.

F. Accept Gifts

DOCUMENT: *Memo to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee from Mary Wallace, Treasurer, dated 6/4/15*

Ms. Appy moved to accept \$500 from the Class of 2015 for a scholarship donation for the Class of 2016 and \$500 from an anonymous donor for two Community Building Awards. Ms. Hazzard seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Ms. Traphagen moved that the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee accept any and all donations of backpacks, supplies, and monetary gifts in support of the Backpack Project for school year 2015-2016. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion was unanimously approved

4. School Committee Planning

8:21 PM

Topics for June 23 include reorganization, the second reading of the climate data collection policy, regionalization wrap-up discussion, later start initial discussion, and 7-12 consolidation. Mr. Baptiste suggested having a human resources update on hiring. Mr. Robb asked for an update on the South East Campus and on the school committee expenditures. Ms. Douagnmany Cage asked for agenda items on the community survey and what lawsuits are outstanding. Mr. Hood noted that he believes there are too many items for discussion at the next meeting, noting that just the policy and the regionalization discussion are a full meeting. He also noted that he wants it on the record that, although he supports the changes, the School Committee has the authority to vote on a change as big as the schedule changes. He encouraged the committee to vote on such issues in the future.

5. Adjournment

8:35 PM

Ms. Traphagen moved to adjourn at 8:35 p.m. Ms. Douangmany Cage seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland