

**Regular Meeting of the Amherst School Committee**  
**February 10, 2015**  
**6:00 p.m.**  
**Library, Amherst Regional High School**

**In Attendance:**

Katherine Appy, Chair

Rick Hood

Lawrence O'Brien

Kathleen Traphagen (arrived @ 6:06)

**Absent:**

Amilcar Shabazz

Maria Geryk, Superintendent

Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent

Sean Mangano, Finance Director

Public

Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

**1. Welcome and Approve Minutes**

**6:03 p.m.**

Ms. Appy called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. and reviewed the agenda. Mr. O'Brien moved to approve the minutes of January 20, 2015. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**2. Public**

**6:07 p.m.**

Marylou Theilman, Finance Committee, asked if the revised Regional Agreement has been received from the attorney and whether any public forums have been set. Ms. Appy reported that the Regional Agreement was received today and the Amherst Public Forum is scheduled for March 3<sup>rd</sup>.

**3. Subcommittee Updates**

**6:09 p.m.**

**A. AEF**—There was no report for this subcommittee.

**B. Audit Subcommittee**—There was no report for this subcommittee.

**C. ACTV Liaison**—There was no report for this subcommittee.

**D. BCG**—Ms. Appy noted that the BCG has not met but is scheduled to meet on March 6 at 10:00 a.m.

**E. JCPC**—Ms. Appy reported that JCPC has met several times with town departments and is scheduled to meet with the schools in two weeks. She noted that they meet at 9:30 a.m. on Thursdays at Town Hall. Ms. Appy cautioned that this will be a year in which there are less funds than requests so hard decisions will be necessary.

**3. New and Continuing Business**

**6:11 p.m.**

**A. Advocacy Discussion**

***DOCUMENT: MTA 2015-16 Legislative Agenda***

Ms. Appy introduced Max Page who is in attendance to speak to the School Committee about advocacy opportunities. Mr. Page noted that he is speaking on behalf of the MTA, not for the local APEA, regarding the MTA legislative agenda for 2015-2016. He outlined the top three priorities of the two-year agenda, which include stopping high-stakes testing, calling for a moratorium on new charter schools and setting a progressive tax system to better support education. Mr. Page noted the importance of School Committees lending their support to these issues, including testifying and showing up to meetings and hearings. Mr. Page answered clarifying questions about the MTA legislative agenda, and Ms. Appy opened the floor for discussion of how the School Committee's advocacy priorities align with the MTA agenda. She noted that her areas of priority are high-stakes testing, unfunded mandates and universal Pre-K. Mr. O'Brien identified universal Pre-K, charter school, and language acquisition programs. Mr. Hood stated that a moratorium on high-stakes testing, mandatory Pre-K, and unfunded mandates are priorities for him, noting that he is also very interested in advocating for more school funding from state money rather than local money. Ms. Traphagen agreed that the moratorium on high-stakes testing, language acquisition and universal Pre-K are priorities, noting that the issue of early childhood education is a very complex one. Ms. Appy requested that Mr. Page stay connected with the school committee to help guide them on next steps in advocating for these issues. Mr. Page noted that MTA will be developing more specific plans that will involve local school committees.

**B. FY15 Second Quarter Budget Update**

***DOCUMENT: Amherst Schools Operating Budget FY2015 Second Quarter Report***

Mr. Mangano reviewed the highlights of the second quarter budget report, noting that the schools are anticipated to end the year under budget at this point in the year. There were no questions from the School Committee regarding the report.

**C. FY16 Budget Hearing**

***DOCUMENT: Amherst Public Schools FY16 Budget Additions/Reductions to Level Services Budget; Updated Replacement Pages for Budget Binder (Pages 19, 20, 27-32)***

Mr. Mangano briefly reviewed the details from the budget additions/reductions page of the FY2016 budget and Ms. Appy opened the floor for questions and discussion. Ms. Traphagen asked for more information about the shift from paraeducators

to certified special education teachers. Ms. Geryk explained that the services that will be provided to students will be done by a certified staff person, which allows for co-teaching that is more inclusive for students. There will still be some paraeducators working with students based on needs. Mr. Morris noted that some of the district's paraeducators are licensed teachers and are being encouraged to apply for the positions. Ms. Geryk said that there is a high turnover rate among paraeducators each year so there is still a lot of opportunity for paraeducators who want to retain a position to do so, even with cuts. Mr. O'Brien asked about the reduction in kindergarten grant funding. Ms. Geryk noted that this reflects the choice not to apply for the funding due to the GOLD assessment requirements. Ms. Traphagen asked if any funds are being included for field trips after the issue was discussed at the last meeting. Mr. Morris said that he believes it is important to address some structural inequities with regard to field trips before putting funds into the budget. He said he is very interested in having conversations around this topic to make sure it is addressed. Ms. Geryk agreed that it is not a quick determination that can be made within the next few weeks. Ms. Appy asked that it be included on the agenda for next month, and Ms. Traphagen suggested inviting the PGOs to attend for the discussion. Mr. Morris provided an update on the addition of a 0.6 music position, thanking John Bechtold for his work on the issue. Details still need to be fine-tuned, but the music teachers agree that 0.6 is in the ballpark to allow music to be added at grade three.

#### **D. School Choice Vote**

Ms. Geryk said that the recommendation of the administration is to approve school choice with a very select number of seats opened. She noted that seats will only be opened to round out numbers in classrooms, not to add classrooms. Mr. Hood moved to continue as a school choice district in the 2015-2016 school year. Mr. O'Brien seconded and brief discussion followed. Mr. O'Brien asked if it is possible to get a budget report on the school choice funds and their impact. Mr. Mangano noted that he can provide such a report shortly. The motion was then unanimously approved.

#### **E. MSBA Update**

Mr. Morris reported that the district received 10 OPM applications, which is a healthy number. Members of the selection committee have reviewed the applications based on a rubric they developed and will be meeting tomorrow to discuss them and select finalists. Ms. Appy noted that the interviews are Monday, February 23 for most of the day. At Mr. Hood's request, Mr. Mangano reviewed the role of the OPM and the options that will be considered under the feasibility study. Discussion followed regarding the need for public participation in the process and the ways in which such participation can happen.

#### **F. Accept Gifts**

There were no gifts to be approved.

#### **5. School Committee Planning**

**7:21 p.m.**

**Calendar and Future Agenda Items**—March topics will include field trips and FY16 budget vote. Later start time impact at the elementary level will be on the April agenda.

#### **7. Adjourn**

**7:22 p.m.**

Mr. O'Brien moved to adjourn at 7:22 p.m. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Debbie Westmoreland