

## **Amherst Education Foundation Planning for a Strong Future**

As many parents are aware, the budget crisis facing our school district in the coming years is dire. Last weekend, several board members of the non-profit Amherst Education Foundation (AEF), and Glenda Cresto, the new principal of the Middle School (ARMS), met to discuss critical issues facing ARMS and the district as a whole. Now in its 15th year, AEF's mission is to enhance academic excellence for all students in the public schools of Amherst, Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury. Over the last two years, AEF has contributed over \$85,000 to the schools, and plans are underway to dramatically increase this amount to meet the needs of the district's students in the increasingly limited budget environment.

AEF is entering its next phase of strategic planning in order to establish a reliable source of long-term funding for the Amherst Regional Public Schools. AEF's development and strategic planning committees are working to create an even more powerful funding mechanism that provides significant support for teachers and students on a consistent basis.

Last spring several members of AEF met with former School Superintendent Jere Hochman to begin this planning process. His suggestions included funding for professional development for teachers. The meeting with Glenda Cresto was the second in a series of meetings to gather information on the district's most pressing needs. Ms. Cresto's suggestions included funding long-term programs with 3- to 5-year commitments. One such initiative is a teacher mentoring program which would improve the teacher turnover rate.

In the coming months, AEF will meet with (or survey) principals, teachers, parents, the local business community, town management, and others. Dr. Hochman and Ms. Cresto's ideas, combined with those that will be gathered this fall, will create a new roadmap for AEF for funding public schools in the district.

Visit AEF's website: <http://www.amhersteducationfoundation.org/> to make tax-deductible general or targeted donations to local schools.