

**REGULAR Meeting of the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee  
Tuesday, December 15, 2015  
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Trevor Baptiste, Chair  
Katherine Appy  
Vira Douangmany-Cage (arr. 6:10 p.m.)  
Kip Fonsh  
Phoebe Hazzard (arr. 6:02 p.m.)  
Rick Hood  
Stephen Sullivan  
Kathleen Traphagen (arr. 6:05 p.m.)  
Josiah Vaquez (arr. 6:07 p.m.)

Maria Geryk, Superintendent  
Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent  
Sean Mangano, Finance Director  
Kathy Mazur, Human Resources Director  
Rachel Bowen, Ass't Human Resources Director  
Faye Brady, Student Services Director  
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal  
Miki Gromacki, ARHS Assistant Principal  
Nathaniel Woodruff, ARHS Science Dept Chair  
Ned Young, ARHS Computer Science Teacher  
Nick Harrison, ARHS Technology Teacher  
Marisa Mendonsa, ARMS Principal  
Marta Guevara, Family Engagement Director  
Monica Hall, Equity/PD Director  
Community & Press  
Kimberly Stender, Recorder

**ABSENT**

Dan Robb

**OBSERVER**

Emily Marriott

**1. Welcome**

**6:00 p.m.**

Mr. Baptiste called to meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. He asked the committee to review the agenda and suggest changes. Ms. Appy requested that the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPA) update be presented after the Superintendent's Update. Mr. Fonsh asked the same of the Policy Committee update. In respect to time and topics, he recommended that the agenda be closely adhered. Ms. Appy moved to approve the minutes of November 10, 2015 and December 5, 2015. Mr. Fonsh seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

**2. Announcements & Public Comment**

**6:03 p.m.**

Peter Demling (community member) suggested that the administration be mindful of unnecessary spending and consultant fees. He recommended that the district create in-house surveys for parents/guardians, students, staff and community members. He stated that the University of Chicago 5Essentials partnership and survey work was unnecessary as it was very expensive. Mr. Demling urged administrators to seek information from parents/guardians of students leaving the schools for vocational and charter schools. He suggested that if this information is known then perhaps a solution could be created to end this flight. He asked to see information compiled from exit surveys. Mr. Demling suggested that Central Office positions be eliminated to sustain the budget. Vince O'Connor (community member) urged that all towns be on the same page when discussing Regionalization in terms of finances and governance. He distributed his most recent school committee campaign literature and urged the administration and leaders of the four towns to solicit additional funding from Amherst College in a coordinated effort to sustain the budget. Mr. Baptiste announced that Mr. Robb can no longer serve as the Pelham representative on the Regional School Committee. He invited current Pelham School Committee member Emily Marriott to join the group as the new Regional representative. The Pelham School Committee will officially vote this at the January 6, 2016 meeting. Mr. Robb will remain on the Pelham School Committee. Ms. Marriott remained at the table for the duration of the meeting but did not vote or comment.

**3. Superintendent's Update**

**6:10 p.m.**

***DOCUMENT: Accountability Update***

Ms. Geryk announced that the ARHS Library was the recipient of a \$65,500.00 gift from the trust of Ann Louise Hyde. This gift will be approved at the January 12, 2016 meeting. She spoke enthusiastically about the recent ARHS Performing Arts production of *Bum Bum* which showcased

the talents of 35 students and Mr. John Bechtold. Ms. Geryk invited all to attend the upcoming ARPS Family Center events: Juntos We Play at the Olympia Oaks Community Room on Tuesday, December 22, 2015 from 4:30 p.m.- 6:30 p.m. and the Makers Space event at Amherst Media on Thursday, December 17, 2015 from 6:30 p.m. -7:30 p.m. Mr. Morris thought this to be an appropriate time to briefly discuss the MCAS results. ARMS remained a Level 2 school while ARHS dropped to Level 3. ARHS will appeal this decision and DESE seems willing to cooperate. Ms. Douangmany-Cage reminded the group of the strong “opt out” movement currently occurring across the nation and that ARPS should be cognizant of this. Mr. Baptiste suggested that the Regional School Committee assist in explaining to community members what this drop in levels means. In this way, the impact regarding public concern may be lessened.

**4. Subcommittee Updates**

**6:14 p.m.**

***DOCUMENT: Letter from US Dept. of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services***

Ms. Appy reported that the Policy Subcommittee met twice in December and was able to categorize, update and revise policies. She stated that two policies will be discussed at the January 12, 2016 meeting (Personnel: Violence in the Workplace and Weapons in Schools). The Policy Subcommittee will continue this work collaboratively and systematically at the January 11, 2016 meeting. Ms. Douangmany-Cage requested that the policies around fundraising and equity be reviewed. Mr. Baptiste instructed her to send policy review requests to him and the Policy Subcommittee. Ms. Appy reported that SEPAC hosted an IEP workshop on Monday, December 7, 2015 which was well attended. SEPAC is also hosting a Basic Rights Workshop on Wednesday, December 16, 2015. She paraphrased a letter from the U.S. Dept. of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services pertaining to IEP alignment per grade to ensure student achievement and access.

**5. New & Continuing Business**

**6:25 p.m.**

**A. FY 17 Budget**

***DOCUMENTS: Four Town Meeting Regional Schools December 5, 2015 Powerpoint; Appendix D Method for the Transition to the Statutory Method; Region Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Memorandum***

Ms. Geryk explained that the budget information was presented at the Four Town Meeting on December 5, 2015. She thanked those members who attended and contributed to the conversation. Mr. Mangano reviewed the powerpoint and answered questions regarding choice out tuition reimbursement, charter tuition aid, and assessment methods. Ms. Geryk stated that student exit survey information is available on the district website. Mr. Mangano stated that Regionalization and the proposed 7-12 Consolidation could positively impact the budget and decrease reductions. Ms. Geryk added that information presented at the Four Town meeting was consistent with prior conversations dating back five years and that town leaders struggled with the assessment method topic. Mr. Mangano invited all school committee members to participate in the Regional Assessment Method Working group meeting on Thursday, December 17 at 2:00 p.m. in the Professional Development Center at ARMS. Mr. Mangano and Ms. Geryk explained the assessment process in depth. Mr. Baptiste suggested that all Regional School Committee members help determine which assessment method will ultimately be adopted by the four towns. Mr. Hood urged the group to consider both short and long term implications of each assessment method scenario. Mr. Fonsh stated that the Four Town meeting was an important lesson regarding Regionalization and assessment methods as it rendered a broader understanding of the dire financial situation faced by all towns. He added that if the RAMWG meeting on December 17, 2015 is an indication of collaboration and positive conversations towards a solution, then the Four Town Meeting served its purpose. He urged that all town leaders continue to explain the importance of the two-vote process and to continue to educate all residents about Regionalization. Mr. Fonsh added that a recent public forum held at 7:45 a.m. attracted 45 parents of Leverett pre-schoolers.

**B. 7-12 Consolidation Update****6:57 p.m.*****DOCUMENT: 7-12 Consolidation Memorandum***

Ms. Mazur updated presented the five options listed in the memo. She explained each one and answered questions from the committee. Ms. Mazur explained that some options were most likely not likely but were being explored because parents/guardians indicated that they should. She stated that more information surrounding each option, including potential Regional leasing considerations, will be presented at the January 26, 2016 meeting. Design renderings, cost analysis, timeline and pertinent details will be presented to the committee. Mr. Hood asked about design limitations and Ms. Mazur stated she was not too concerned with this aspect of the process. Mr. Fonsh asked if programmatic changes were being considered specifically to math and science. Ms. Mazur stated that new vocational and 21<sup>st</sup> Century-themed programs could be created which could potentially keep students enrolled in the schools. She added that all challenges must be addressed in a comprehensive plan and that once people understand the dilemmas caused by a potential consolidation they may be more apt to help create a positive change and solution. Ms. Traphagen asked if a Grade 7-8 wing would be more expensive. Ms. Mazur explained that 32 classrooms are needed for Grades 7 & 8. The impact on Grades 9-12 would be great and space sharing may be a solution. Ms. Traphagen asked about Grade 8 students taking electives. Ms. Geryk stated that all options voiced by parents/guardians, students and staff will be explored. Ms. Geryk added that information regarding the future location of South East Campus will be presented to students in January 2016. Feedback gathered from this group will be considered in the final decision. The ARHS Student Advisory Council will facilitate this survey. Ms. Appy suggested that this would be a perfect time to hear from Mr. Vasquez as the 7-12 Consolidation is a main topic at the ARHS Student Advisory Council (SAC) meetings of which she is attending. Mr. Baptiste asked the committee if item "E" could be moved up on the agenda. All agreed. Mr. Vasquez reported that students would like to learn more about Consolidation as many misconceptions existed. They were happy to know their ideas could impact the decision. Most students assumed that the final decision was already made but were relieved to know that their voices will be heard and considered in the process. Mr. Vasquez explained that SAC members were soliciting feedback during lunch periods and creating a survey. He added that several older students wanted to create a mentor program for younger students who would be new to the school. He invited the school committee members to attend upcoming SAC meetings (Jan 12 @ 8am; Feb 9 @ 10:45am; Mar 1 @ 9am; Apr 12 @ 10:45am; May 10 @ 8am; Jun 7 @ 9am). In keeping with the agenda and time parameters, Mr. Baptiste asked the committee to allow for more time on this topic. Mr. Fonsh made a motion to allow for five more minutes of conversation to discuss 7-12 Consolidation. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion passed unanimously. Ms. Hazard thought administrators should visit other districts in which there is a 7-12 high school model. Mr. Baptiste inquired about cost parameters around a Regional leasing agreement at ARMS. Ms. Mazur responded that 10 classrooms would be needed and would cost \$100.00 each annually resulting in a \$10,000.00 cost. Ms. Douangmany-Cage would like more information on Option #5. Ms. Appy recalled that this option was considered approximately five years ago and it failed to gain favorable support.

**C. School Improvement Plans****7:23 p.m.**

***DOCUMENTS: Amherst Regional Middle School Improvement Plan; ARMS Preliminary Spring 2015 MCAS School Results by Subgroup (Mathematics, English Language Arts, Science/Technology/Engineering); The Center for School Climate and Learning ARMS Climate Survey Data Summary December 2014; 2015 ARMS School Council Family Survey; ARHS School improvement Plan 2015-2016; ARHS Preliminary Spring 2015 MCAS School Results by Subgroup (Mathematics, English Language Arts, Biology, Chemistry, Technology/Engineering); The Center for School Climate and Learning ARHS Climate Survey Data Summary January 2015***

Ms. Mendonsa began the presentation by indicating the ARMS SIP is a two-year plan and then explained the three main goals of the report and initiatives and programs embedded in each. Mr. Jackson spoke to the highlights of the ARHS SIP report which focused on transition from a trimester to semester schedule and the greater relationship between student and teacher in the classroom; the creation of special education accessibility standards; and asset-based approach to

professional development regarding special education. Ms. Traphagen thanked Ms. Mendonsa for including specific quantitative goals, data and baseline information to the SIP. She is concerned that 60% of students polled in the climate survey indicated that they do not feel welcome at ARMS. Ms. Mendonsa finds this statistic alarming and unacceptable. Ms. Traphagen inquired about art and music programs and Ms. Mendonsa stated that the programs seemed strong and more information will be forthcoming in Spring 2016. She added that the arts integration coordinator was working with many teachers and staff. Ms. Douangmany-Cage asked if the climate surveys could be shared with the SETF and Ms. Geryk said they could indeed be shared. Ms. Appy thanked the principals for thoughtful reports. Mr. Fonsh also thanked the principals for their continued commitment and work. He found some of the climate survey numbers alarming especially those concerning 32% of students categorized as “Other” and how this category is being defined. Mr. Jackson explained that “other” refers to gender identity and those that are transitioning. He commended the Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) for their work in creating a hospitable environment at ARHS. Ms. Geryk pointed out that these students find themselves in a high-risk situation across the nation and we must do what we can here for students. In regards to MCAS Technology/Engineering scores, Mr. Fonsh asked why scores were left blank. Mr. Morris explained that DESE deemed participation too low to categorize. Mr. Fonsh added that perhaps the new ARHS course focusing on computer science could help turn this around. In keeping with the agenda and time parameters, Mr. Baptiste asked the committee to allow for more time on this topic. He asked if agenda items “G” and “F” be tabled for a future meeting. All agreed and a vote was not necessary. Ms. Appy was hopeful that the push for special education accommodations for students to achieve would positively impact MCAS scores. Mr. Jackson commended the work of Jane Mudie and Bill Blatner (ARHS Math Dept) for being intrinsic in this work. Mr. Hood thought the climate surveys were excellent and provided great data. Maria offered to provide more information around race criteria and climate. Ms. Traphagen was curious to know how ARMS and ARHS ranked nationally in terms of the climate survey. Ms. Geryk will provide this information at a future meeting. She suggested Dave Slovin give a presentation around SEC at a future meeting.

**D. New ARHS Course**

**8:04 p.m.**

***DOCUMENTS: Proposed Class: Exploring Computer Science; Introductory Computer Science Courses Coming to Western Massachusetts High Schools; Daily Hampshire Gazette: Cracking the Code; Beyond Access: Broadening Participation in High School Computer Science***

ARHS teachers, Nathaniel Woodruff, Nick Harrison and Ned Young, presented information on a gateway course, Exploring Computer Science (ECS), and then answered questions involving content, student enrollment and course sequencing. Ms. Douangmany-Cage was hopeful that this ECS could create a pipeline for elementary students and ARMS students in the computer science field. Ms. Geryk added that ECS is a great example of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning and project-based approach. Mr. Fonsh made a motion to show collective support for the Exploring Computer Science. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

**E. Accept Gifts**

**8:31 p.m.**

***DOCUMENT: Memo from Mary Wallace, ARPS Treasurer***

Mr. Hood moved to accept the regional gift from Joshua Rose in the amount of \$25.00 to support SEC Principal’s Gift Account. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

**4. School Committee Business**

**8:32 p.m.**

All Regionalization Public Forum Feedback documents will be posted on the Regional School Committee Google Drive for reference. Mr. Fonsh implored that the Regionalization discussion continue in each community and that residents receive accurate information. Ms. Appy commented that the discussion will continue after the vote. Mr. Baptiste urged all committee members to clarify Regionalization information to the public. The MASC Update is scheduled for the January 26, 2016 meeting.

**5. Adjournment**

**8:42 p.m.**

Ms. Traphagen moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 p.m. Ms. Douangmany-Cage seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kimberly Stender