

1 **Amherst School Board**  
2 **Thursday, October 18, 2012**

3  
4 **ATTENDANCE**

5  
6 Amherst School Board

7 Peg Bennett, Lucienne Foulks, Amy Facey, Paul Prescott, and James Manning (6:31pm)

8  
9 Administrative Team

10 Peter Warburton, Gerry St. Amand, Porter Dodge, Renea Sparks, Betty Shankel, and  
11 Nicole Heimarck

12  
13 Minute Taker

14 Beth Penney

15  
16 **CALL TO ORDER**

17  
18 Ms. Bennett called the meeting to order at 6:10pm.

19  
20 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

21 Principals' reports

22 No questions.

23 Correspondence

24 No correspondence.

25 **PUBLIC TIME**

26 No Public present.

27 **CONSENT AGENDA**

28 **Mr. Prescott made a motion to accept the consent agenda containing the Minutes for**  
29 **September 20, 2012, Treasurer's report for August 2012, and the Budget transfers.**  
30 **Ms. Facey seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.**

31 **PRESENTATIONS/REPORTS**

32 Amherst Garden Club

33 Ms. Foulks asked about the raised beds that have flowers and vegetables.

34 Mr. St. Amand stated that there are six beds that will have flowers and vegetables. He  
35 will bring pictures for a future meeting.

36 Mr. Dodge stated that two 7<sup>th</sup> grade teachers, Linda Farrington and Corey White, worked  
37 with the Garden Club to have a sustainable garden out behind the school located behind  
38 the principals office. He showed pictures of the garden to the board.

39 Mr. Dodge introduced the 8<sup>th</sup> graders, who as 7<sup>th</sup> graders worked on the garden: Olivia  
40 Mullens, Maddy Maurais, Shannon Earley, Garrett Early, and Alex Gaudette.

41 The students presented to the board the following information. The project started two  
42 years ago with Mr. White and Ms. Ferrington. The idea was to plant a garden to use the  
43 vegetables in the Life Skills class and in the cafeteria. The Garden Club donated money  
44 to establish 8 garden beds. This project helped the students learn about plant biology and  
45 where their food comes from. The year before the students built the first 8 beds and these  
46 students built the second 8 and added signs to label the beds. The work was done during  
47 science and Core and More. In the future, they are installing greenhouses to extend the  
48 fall growing season and grow seedlings in the spring. Many of the students took  
49 vegetables home to eat. In Life Skills, they made appetizers for themselves and the  
50 teachers.

51 Mr. Dodge stated that this is an organic garden. He discussed the greenhouses. The  
52 school is looking at a large one that someone is donating with automatic windows and  
53 smaller greenhouse has already been purchased. The school will expand the beds and the  
54 beds are fully irrigated already. The plan is to continue this project because of the life  
55 lesson in sustainability.

56 The students discussed the fun aspects of building the beds and planting the seeds, what  
57 was measured last spring, and some science projects that were based on the growth of the  
58 garden and how organic it was. They are more open to eating vegetables because they  
59 grew them.

60 Mr. Dodge discussed the bench out front and how that will become an outdoor classroom  
61 with a stage once the funds come in.

62 Mr. Warburton stated that he was invited to speak at a Garden Club meeting. There are  
63 over 100 members and it is not an easy group to get into. At the meeting there were  
64 speakers giving presentations. Our students appreciate what the Garden Club gives us.  
65 At the annual plant sale they raised \$15,000, which, is given to Share and to support, the  
66 garden needs at the schools and the town. He thanked the Garden Club and all the  
67 students for their hard work.

68 FY14Budget

69 Ways and Means Committee introduction

70 Carol Holden introduced the chair Mark Vincent.

71 Mark Vincent introduced the members:

72 Tedd Landon, Roberta Hasselbrack, Andrew Rowe, Fred Iannelli, Donni Hodgkins and

73 Michael Costolo; Alternate: Stephanie Hall

74 Budget Assumptions

75 Ms. Shankel presented the FY14 budget assumptions, as in the presentation, discussing  
76 the following: federal and state grants, catastrophic/Medicare AID, Unreserved Fund  
77 balance, enrollments, historical staffing and enrollments showing a decrease over time,  
78 and class size.

79 Ms. Shankel discussed that they are making a change to the student load by increasing 2  
80 students per class in grades 3-8. These numbers are averages so some class sizes can be  
81 more or less.

82 Ms. Shankel continued with the presentation discussing staffing considerations including,  
83 administration, special education, support staff, facilities management, and teachers. She  
84 discussed staffing benefits and NH retirement. The increase in health care will be 11.2%  
85 for FY14. Ms. Shankel discussed health insurance and what has been done to keep costs  
86 down. She continued the presentation by discussing the increases in health care and NH  
87 retirement and what the percentage of the budget each will be. Before the start of  
88 budgeting the budget will be 3% higher than last year because of health insurance and  
89 NH retirement.

90 Ms. Shankel continued the presentation by discussing contracts, new hires, retirements,  
91 and operations including fuel costs, maintenance and repairs, transportation, and food  
92 service. Ms. Shankel discussed how new regulations from the USDA will add costs.

93 Ms. Shankel continued the presentation by discussing technology including curriculum  
94 initiatives, 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom updates, infrastructure, and replacement cycles. She  
95 also discussed initiatives that will impact the budget including the Math program  
96 implementation, professional development, summer curriculum development in aligning  
97 core literacy standards with Reading Street, Integrated arts curriculum development,  
98 Supervision and evaluation program review, and the hours based calendar. She continued  
99 by discussing the expendable trust and the need for that fund. The current balance in that  
100 fund is \$18,151 after fixing the AMS library roof. She discussed the budget timeline.

101 Ms. Shankel discussed changing the date of the deliberative session to a Saturday to join  
102 the Souhegan School Board in hope that more people would come.

103 Mr. Vincent asked about the new RSA that sets aside a 2.5% of the procreation and if it  
104 should be included as a warrant article.

105 Ms. Shankel stated that this would be for 2.5% of procreation and would have to come  
106 from the surplus. This would be a new fund and would max out at 2.5%. The district  
107 could only add money up to 2.5%. This is different from the expendable trust and is just  
108 an emergency fund. The district would have to make a case to the state telling them what  
109 reason the district has to spend the money. Ms. Shankel stated that she would send Mr.  
110 Vincent and the committee information about the RSA.

111 Mr. Vincent and Ms. Shankel discussed the town's rainy day fund that can roll over from  
112 year to year. That amount includes a percentage from the total procreation. The town  
113 does not have to go to the state to spend the money. This new RSA is the first step for  
114 school districts.

115 Mr. Vincent stated that the very drastic drop in enrollments would play into what the  
116 budget will look like. He discussed how the enrollments being down and the spending  
117 increases would seem in the minds of the voters this year.

118 Ms. Shankel stated that the budget is not all enrollments driven and is based more on  
119 benefits and NH retirement. She explained that NH retirement has been increasing by  
120 20% or more for years. The board and the committee needs to help taxpayers to better  
121 understand why their tax bill has increased and that it is not enrollments based. The  
122 Amherst School District has been reducing staff since enrollments have been decreasing.  
123 The other items driving the budget are out of the district's controls.

124 Mr. Vincent discussed how the board and the Ways and Means committee needs to better  
125 communicate to the voters what the district is doing to decrease and contain the costs.

126 Ms. Foulks discussed making a concerted effort in being more open and communicate  
127 more about the budget. The board needs to be more vocal about the budget and what is in  
128 it.

129 Mr. Warburton stated that the board has a plan about how to communicate with the  
130 public, but they need the help of the Ways and Means to help communicate about the  
131 budget better.

132 Ms. Hasselbrack asked about why the percent increase is over 10% for health insurance  
133 when Harvard Pilgrim in Massachusetts has increases between 3-5%.

134 Ms. Shankel stated that the difference is that NH has one of the highest costs for health  
135 insurance in the country because there is very little competition for insurance companies  
136 in the state and that drives costs up.

137 Mr. Vincent explained that the state also has many mandates about what plans can be  
138 available and what the plans must include. The lack of competition for health insurance  
139 companies is also a huge problem.

140 Mr. Manning asked what the percent increase shows.

141 Ms. Shankel stated the premiums.

142 Ms. Facey asked about the health insurance plans, how long has the district had them, and  
143 why there are so many plans.

144 Ms. Shankel explained the health insurance options and the district's efforts to get plans  
145 employees would be interested in. School districts have a harder time getting plans.  
146 LGC is the third party administrator and Anthem Blue Cross is the provider.

147 Budget Committee Assignments

148 Ms. Bennett asked the board to decide what committees they would like. The board will  
149 decide the committees outside of the meeting and let Ms. Shankel know.

150 Deliberative Dates

151 Saturday, February 2<sup>nd</sup> and will be back to back with Souhegan.

152 FY13 1st Quarter Financial Summary

153 Ms. Shankel stated that there are no final revenue figures and they should be coming  
154 soon. The town of Amherst taxes determines when the district gets the numbers. There  
155 are not a lot of savings in the default budget because it is very close to what the schools  
156 need and the district has been shuffling money around to fill the voids. In personnel and  
157 benefits there is a savings of \$35,000. It is difficult in the September quarterly to have  
158 good numbers because the year has just started, there will be better numbers in  
159 December.

160 **DISCUSSION ITEM**

161 Grading

162 Ms. Bennett explained that the board is having the grading discussion because of the  
163 feedback about too many students on the honor role and many students getting high  
164 grades.

165 The board had a lengthy discussion about the following issues: number of students on the  
166 honor role, grading consistency from classroom to classroom, parent's access to grades  
167 online, grade transparency, and started a philosophical discussion about the A,B,C  
168 grading system. Both the administration and Mr. Dodge support giving parents access to  
169 grades online. There needs to be a discussion with the grading and evaluation committee  
170 and the staff. The grades can be put online using either MMS or Angel. The board  
171 discussed the need to look further into letter grades and assessment practices and to find  
172 the best way to track student growth and their skills over time. The high school's  
173 Academic Learner Expectations were also discussed. The board discussed the difference  
174 between mastery of content and an achievement based system. They discussed that a  
175 new way of thinking would be needed for both students and parents to meet the changing  
176 world of 21<sup>st</sup> century education. They discussed how giving letter grades and alternatives  
177 to that has been discussed for years.

178 Ms. Heimark discussed how this shift is already becoming apparent in the new math  
179 program. The math program is a mastery-based program. There is a shift in rigor and in  
180 thinking. The administration would like to look at not giving grades during the first  
181 trimester while students adjust to the change. This would allow students to be in an  
182 environment where students can take risks, critique others, learn problem solving, and  
183 learn from their own mistakes. These ideas cannot happen with a grading system. The  
184 idea is more about learning and progress and not about what grade did the student get.

185 A parent of a 6<sup>th</sup> and an 8<sup>th</sup> grader, Ellen Roos-Unger, addressed the board about her  
186 concerns that tests from the new math program are not being allowed to come home. She  
187 always looks at her kid's tests and how they solve their problems. She goes over the tests  
188 with her kids, because the tests inform her about what kind of learner they are. The tests  
189 also allow for time with their father to have a discussion about numbers and math. She  
190 stated that she is a great supporter of the teachers, coaches, and Nicole. The district  
191 should create their own assessments that are not included in the grades and can be used to  
192 determine if the program is successful.

193 Ms. Heimarck stated that this is an ongoing challenge and that the committee over the  
194 summer worked on this. She explained the Math in Focus program. The district would  
195 like to keep the summative tests on file at school because they want to measure the  
196 success of the program. NECAP is not a good tool to measure the program's success.  
197 The district needs to have information to see if the work being done is successful, so they  
198 are using the chapter tests, mid-year and end of the year assessments. They are trying to  
199 strike a balance between communication and how to know we are successful. When  
200 decisions were made this summer they did not have teachers or parents voice. The plan is  
201 flexible so changes are going to need to happen. She stated that test security is a concern  
202 and has been brought to the attention of teachers in this community.

203 Mr. Prescott stated that teachers ask parents to support math teaching at home, but they  
204 can only see half that equation. Parents get a result, but cannot help students see where  
205 they went wrong. Since the decision was to pull the tool of the parents using the tests  
206 away from the home, what is being done? Parents cannot expect to always have access to  
207 the teacher.

208 Ms. Heimarck stated that this is a valuable point that they are working to change. She  
209 explained the other tools parents can use including the pre-assessment, which are not  
210 graded tests.

211 The board, Ms. Heimarck, and Ms. Roos-Unger discussed test security and the support of  
212 the community and parents for the new math program. The board wants something to be  
213 offered to parents who want to see their student's tests. This issue will be discussed again  
214 with the curriculum committee, which will also include teachers and parents. This issue  
215 must be communicated out to parents and that the board is working to resolve the issue in  
216 a timely manner. The committee will resolve the issue soon. They discussed that the  
217 major weakness most students have is applying the content and knowledge to new  
218 situations. This may be why some students get good grades on the quizzes and then  
219 struggle with the assessment. The students are getting examples of these types of  
220 questions before the assessments. The board would like to have staff members and  
221 parents come to discuss the new math program further so bumps like this one can be  
222 worked through.

223 The board would also like to hear from staff about putting grades online.

224 Mr. Warburton stated that the Oct. 31<sup>st</sup> coffee is focusing on Math. It is at 9am at the  
225 Brick school.

226 Survey Results

227 Ms. Facey stated that a group met to discuss the results of the survey sent out in July.  
228 There were 242 participants and the survey included 6 questions with both multiple  
229 choice answers and free responses.

230 Ms. Facey discussed the answers to the survey:

231 The preferred method of communication is via email or the websites.

232 People would like emails to be more concise and to limit multiple emails per family.  
233 They would like more notice for events and to see streamlining of information on the  
234 websites.

235 For the Transitions question there were not many answers and not a lot of detail.

236 The programs people would like the board to explore more were a 24 hr. learning  
237 approach, Academic learner expectations, inclusion of world language at the elementary  
238 level, full day Kindergarten and an increase in integrated arts and science.

239 There were many positive comments about the math programs, comments about the  
240 inconsistent use of Angel, need for clarification about the number of school boards, and  
241 comments about increasing academic rigor.

242 Ms. Facey stated that the survey went out prior to the implementation of the Trumba  
243 calendar, monthly coffees, house meetings, and the column in the Citizen.

244 The board discussed the transition question and that many people did not answer it  
245 because it was confusing. They decided that they could deduct that transition is not an  
246 area of concern because there were no comments about transition. The board discussed  
247 resubmitting the question to look for better clarity. There is always more room for  
248 improvement and the schools will continue to work on the transition piece. The board  
249 discussed the new things happening in transition like Mont Vernon and Amherst 6<sup>th</sup>  
250 graders attending camp together and shadow day. They discussed that an SAU 39 goal is  
251 to continue to work on transition. The board discussed being more concise and limiting  
252 emails to one email address.

253 Mr. Warburton discussed giving Kindergarten parents a tour of the high school.

254 Ms. Bennett stated that she would write a piece to the paper to summarize the survey and  
255 what is happening to address some of the communities' concerns.

256 Ms. Foulks made a motion to go into NON-PUBLIC Session under RSA 91-A:3 II (a),  
257 (b), (c) at 8:34pm. Mr. Manning seconded the motion and the roll call was all yes.

258