

AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD

November 5, 2009

FINAL MINUTES

Chairman Head called the meeting to order at 6:10 p.m. and noted that Mr. Graybill was unable to attend the meeting this evening and extended condolences to the family of Tessy McQuin who retired in 2005 after teaching second grade in the Amherst District for 30 years and died this week.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Present

Amherst School Board: Nancy Head, Dwight Brew, Peg Bennett, and Peter Maresco.

Administrative Team: Dr. Mary Jennings, Porter Dodge, Gerry St. Amand, Elizabeth Shankel, and Nicole Heimarck.

Minutes Recorder: Heather Loewy Nichols

ATTENDANCE

A. Principals' Reports

Chairman Head asked if the Board Members had any questions about the principals' reports which were included in their packets and heard none.

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Amherst Middle School First Lego League, team CARS, appeared before the Board and introduced themselves. They explained that the competition they are participating in has two parts; working with a robot and a presentation about the benefits of switching to biodiesel fuel. The boys presented many reasons to switch to biodiesel fuel including health and environmental factors.

III. PUBLIC TIME

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, the boys stated that biodiesel fuel is available but they did not know where.

Scott Derushi appeared before the Board and stated that he has two students, one in the Middle School and one at Wilkins and he is asking the School Board for help in pursuing bus issues and looking into the First Student contract. He stated that he is concerned about rumors revolving around safety issues such as unreported accidents. He also stated that he has had personal incidents with First Student giving out misinformation purposefully and he does not seem to be able to get information from them. He also noted that there is a documentary in the making about the First Student garage that is very damning and confirms allegations. Mr. Derushi stated that his children were on a bus with a broken window and that there are more and more stories each which have been handled on an individualized basis. He stated that he talked to First Student about an incident that they said they had no knowledge of but then he saw a letter that

sated otherwise and he thinks that the Board should be aware of the concerns.

Ms. Head thanked Mr. Derushi for coming to the Board and asked Ms. Shankel to look into the issue.

Ms. Shankel stated that she has spoken to Mrs. Derushi, but she is not aware of rumors and therefore can not look into them. She stated that many times parents have called with an issue and she has looked into it and returned their phone calls.

**Ms. Head asked that Mr. Derushi get the facts and meet with Ms. Shankel and then report back to the Board.

Mr. Derushi stated that he does not think that First Student is communicating all the facts to Ms. Shankel and he would like the administration to explore First Student's contractual obligations and make sure they are being met.

In response to a question from Chairman Head, Mr. Brew asked that the minutes be pulled from the consent agenda.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

A MOTION was made by Mr. Brew and SECONDED Mr. Maresco to accept the Consent Agenda as follows:

B. Transfers

Voting: 4 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Maresco and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to approve the minutes of October 8, 2009 as amended.

Voting: 3 ayes; motion carried with Mr. Maresco abstaining.

A. Middle School Schedule – Specials

V. PRESENTATION

Mr. Dodge explained that at the last meeting the Board raised a concern about large classes that may pose safety issues. He then reviewed the average class sizes for specials and the largest class sizes noting that PE has one class with 27 students, Comprehensive Tech Education has an average class size of 21 students but has one class with 26 students due to a scheduling issue for one student, and the Life Skills class has an average of 22 students and the largest class is 25 students.

Dr. Jennings asked for a more in depth review.

Mr. Dodge explained that in Grade 5 students have one period, or 60 days per year, of Integrated Arts; two days out of every six is spent in wellness class, two days out of six are for band or chorus/general music and two days out of six are

spent in art for two terms and two days out of every six are spent in library skills for one term.

Mr. Dodge stated that Grade 6 students get two Integrated Arts periods per day; one of which is spent in wellness alternating with world language and the other of which is divided into three sections of two periods out of six a week. For the first section students take a mandatory music class, either band or chorus/general music and for the second and third sections students choose from Art, Comprehensive Tech Ed, or Life Skills.

Mr. Dodge explained that in Grades 7 and 8 the schedule is the same but students have more choices and they are not required to take music. They are required to take one period of wellness alternating with world language and for the second period the student can choose any three of the Integrated Arts.

Mr. Dodge stated that they have the staff to cover the classes and he will possibly be able to lower the class size in the safety conscience classes.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Mr. Dodge explained that students participate in 30 days of Health and 60 days of PE. He noted that the teachers do a good job getting the wellness education into the students and then they go to a good wellness program in the High School but the students are not required to do as much.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Mr. Dodge stated that he can adjust the scheduling to have the peak amount closer to the average class size but he will need to use the PE classes to take some of the overload.

Ms. Head questioned whether there had ever been discussion about having advisories at the Middle School level. Mr. Dodge stated that it could be done and in fact the NELMS reviewers thought that the school should consider it but there is a struggle to maintain as much academic time as possible. He stated that he philosophically agrees that that advisories are a good idea but he is not sure that there is enough time during the day.

After further discussion, in response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Mr. Dodge explained that sometimes an IEP allows for a child to miss a subject for special services but mostly they are not missing specials for services.

B. FY11 Budget – 1st Draft

Dr. Jennings explained that at the last meeting the Board reviewed the budget assumptions and now the Board needs to consider any warrant articles and the

draft with the Ways and Means Committee. She explained that the goal is to have the budget completed in January. She noted that the key drivers to the plan are the strategic plan, maintaining a high level of academic achievement, honoring the present contracts, sustaining curriculum and technology initiatives, and expansion of Response To Intervention. She stated that the budget is a 1.45% increase without the AEA agreement.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Shankel stated that last year's budget was a 2.2% increase when the operating budget and the warrant articles, such as the ASSA agreement, are included.

Dr. Jennings reviewed the enrollments versus staffing from FY08-FY11 noting that as the district has lost students it has adjusted staffing accordingly.

**Ms. Shankel stated that she will send copies of the staffing breakdown comparison to the Board.

Dr. Jennings reviewed the current administrative and curriculum structure and proposed a new assistant principal K-8 to oversee the math and science curriculum and the reduction of the curriculum coordinators down to three. She noted that this would mean the addition of a .5 administrator across the two schools.

In response to a question from Mr. Maresco, Ms. Heimarck stated that curriculum coordinators are full time teachers who carry a regular teaching load and assume curriculum duties above their regular day. She explained that they have very little time during the day to have curriculum leadership and oversight in the buildings and she feels that because of this some of the curriculum revisions have failed; not because of the coordinators but because of the timing. She also noted that they do not have supervisory duties.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Heimarck explained that the new assistant principal will be available full time for the implementation of the new curriculum.

Mr. Brew noted that they also have two full time literacy coaches.

Dr. Jennings stated that there are two full math coaches but they are not administrators or curriculum evaluators and it is important that the coaches are not supervisors of the teachers. She stated that they also do not implement curriculum. She further explained that Hollis/Brookline has two K-8 assistant principals, one for math and one for humanities, but she only proposed one

because she feels that the literacy is being handled by the Principals and the Literacy Coaches.

Mr. Brew expressed concern that they have added four full time positions that do not interact with the students during an enrollment decline.

Dr. Jennings explained that there has been a decline in enrollment but the district has also introduced some very important high value curriculum and the administration wants to make sure it is implemented well.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Ms. Heimarck stated that the load presently carried is vastly different and the math and science coordinators are carrying a very large load and they have expressed concern about the implementation but they are not in the position to be supervising other colleagues who may not be implementing the curriculum as well as they could.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Ms. Heimarck stated that the coordinator position does not supervise or evaluate and she knows that some of the previous implementations were not done to the fullest because there was not a person to effectively evaluate and this is an efficient model to get that done. Ms. Heimarck also noted that the K-8 position will allow the person to be a link through both Clark/Wilkins and the Amherst Middle School.

Dr. Jennings noted that this budget also includes technology support for Response To Intervention and differentiated instruction, and infrastructure with a new focus on technology rich classrooms and continuance of the replacement program.

Mr. St. Amand thanked the building coordinators, teachers, and curriculum coordinators for their assistance with the budget. He then reviewed the proposed budget noting the focus on Response To Intervention and ongoing professional development. Mr. St. Amand presented a graph of the actual enrollments versus projected enrollments.

Mr. St. Amand reviewed the educational programming for FY11 noting that the math curriculum will be under review and they will continue to focus on early literacy and Response To Intervention. He also noted that they will continue to administer multiple assessments, integrate technology, and focus on flexible grouping with a full implementation in grades K, 1, and 2, and partial implementation in grades 3 and 4.

Mr. St. Amand reviewed his proposed staffing changes noting that he is

proposing decreasing 1.0 FTE Special Education teacher while classroom teachers will remain the same. He also noted that he is proposing moving a .5 FTE Occupational Therapist to regular education and a .25 speech pathologist to early intervention which would overall reduce special education support to 15.2FTE and change the .5 secretary position to a .5 assistant principal to K-8 assistant principal.

Mr. Dodge thanked all the people that help produce the budget for their hard work.

Mr. Dodge stated that the proposed budget supports the school goals and curriculum instructional needs and allows for ongoing Response To Intervention implementation. He then reviewed the student teacher ratios and educational programming needs for FY11 noting that this budget supports the strategic plan and promotes differentiated instruction with a focus on data informed instruction and flexible grouping. He further explained that the proposed budget continues to support the Early Intervention Partnership Program, Response To Intervention, the literacy initiative, and integration of technology into the classroom. Mr. Dodge presented a professional staff comparison noting that in FY10 there are 82.2 FTE professional staff and he is proposing 80.2 FTE staff for FY11. Mr. Dodge compared the non certified staffing noting that in FY10 there are 43.5 FTE staff and he is proposing 44 FTE staff for FY11 which is the addition of technology support. He stated that when the technology directed position was created there were 200 computers and now the Middle School by itself has 400 computers.

In response to a question from Mr. Maresco, Ms. Heimarck explained that they are trying to accelerate the phasing in of the new math curriculum and noted that the addition of the assistant principal devoted to Math and Science will help with this. She also noted that the 2001 revision was never implemented properly.

Dr. Jennings noted that the budget also includes the ARRA funding which will provide funding for differentiated instruction staff development and she believes that differentiated instruction will allow for all students to be at their highest level.

Mr. St. Amand noted that all students are being flexibly grouped which helps students of all ranges and carries through to the Middle School.

Ms. Heimarck noted that the SINI team felt very strongly that all the kids in the school need to sustain they same level of achievement and growth.

After discussion regarding flexible grouping and differentiated instruction and Mr. St. Amand suggested that the Board visit the classrooms and Mr. Heimarck suggested that the differentiated instruction consultant do a community and Board educational session.

C. Clark/Wilkins FY10 Goals

Mr. St. Amand reviewed the goals for Clark/Wilkins and Dr. Jennings noted that they are similar to the Middle Schools goals in that they decided to required goals per grade level.

D. SAU Lease – Report from Committee

Mr. Brew explained that there was a committee formed, with a member from each Board, to look at the existing Brick School lease and to propose improvements. He explained that since 1998 there have not been any major capital projects done to the building and he presented a list of projects that need to be completed on the building. He explained that rather than having a year to year lease it would be better to have that the SAU be required to budget a certain amount to be used for the listed improvements and there would be a committee with members from each Board that would oversee the improvements. He presented a summary of differences between the current and the proposed lease to the Board. Mr. Brew noted that the rent would be reduced to \$1 as long as the SAU keeps the building from falling into disrepair by committing a fixed amount each year for capital improvements. He also noted that the SAU can carry budget money from year to year where as the district can not.

E. FY10 – 1st Quarter Report

Ms. Shankel presented the first quarter financial report and explained that the interest revenue will be down from what was budgeted, probably close to \$50,000, but they are still in a positive situation overall. She explained that there is savings from the more expensive teachers retiring and also changes in Health Insurance benefits. She also noted that she expects a \$40,000 savings from the change in heating method and a savings of \$10,000 from the bus contract.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Shankel stated that they can still spend the entire operating budget appropriation regardless of the revenue situation.

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDED by Mr. Maresco to enter into non public session.

Roll call taken to enter into non-public session: Brew – yes, Head – yes,

VI. NON-PUBLIC SESSION – RSA 91-A:3 II (a)

Bennett- yes, Maresco – yes.

The Board entered into non-public session at 8:30 p.m.

First topic was retirement request by five teachers via clause 14.4 in the teacher's contract. This discussion centered on whether or not the board would approve the additional cost to the school district for of five teachers retiring under the 14.4 clause, rather than the four positions required in the contract and allocated in the budget. No motion was made to increase the number of 14.4 retirees from four to five. Some options were discussed which would allow all five teachers to retire without incurring additional cost to the school district, but the end result is that the board's position was that only the four 14.4 retirements required by the contract should be authorized.

A second topic was the proposed new administrative structure which contained a shared assistant principal position to focus on math and science. The board asked for the proposal to be revised to potentially reflect a more classical organizational hierarchy. The board thought the current proposal was too complex. Various options were considered and will be discussed at a subsequent board meeting.

A MOTION to exit the non-public session was made by Dwight Brew and SECONDED by Peter Maresco.

Roll call taken to exit non-public session: Brew – yes, Head – yes, Bennett – yes, Maresco – yes.

The board exited non-public session at 9:05 P.M.

A MOTION to adjourn the meeting was made by Peg Bennett and SECONDED by Peter Maresco.

All board members voted in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 9:06 PM.

**VII. REVIEW OF
MEETING/
ADJOURN**