

AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD
December 3, 2009
FINAL MINUTES

Chairman Head called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Present

ATTENDANCE

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

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

Minutes Recorder: Heather Loewy Nichols

A. Principals' Reports

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

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

B. Superintendent's Report

Dr. Jennings stated that the Communities Team met last night and they are looking at ways to coordinate their efforts. She also noted Mr. Dodge is on the team as an administrator.

C. Holiday Open House

Chairman Head stated that Amherst will have an open house at the time of the tree lighting on December 13th and Rich Heart will be telling stories of early Christmas from 3:00 until 4:00 at the Brick School and then cider will be offered until 5:00 p.m.

The First Lego team, Team Exhausted, appeared before the Board and introduced themselves stating that they are sponsored by the Amherst Recreation Department. They noted that the team consists of fourth through eighth graders and for their project they studied the transportation of lettuce to the school in refrigerated trucks. The students explained that the trucks produce a lot of CO₂ and in an effort to reduce CO₂ emissions they suggested growing a school garden, building greenhouses in the local area, and using solar panels on the box trucks. They noted that a school garden does exist on a small scale but it is not being fully utilized. They also questioned whether there is space on school grounds to build greenhouses so that produce can be grown year round.

III. PUBLIC TIME

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, the students explained that a poly house is a greenhouse that is less expensive to build as it is more basic and less

high tech.

Anthony Nino appeared before the Board and explained that on October 26th bus #4 had a minor accident. He stated that there were no injuries but it brought to light some short comings in the policies and procedures. He explained that he has spoken with other parents and they are suggesting a few amendments to the policies and procedures, to better secure the safety of the children, as follows:

- Any accident, even minor, should require EMT response and EMT should make the determination as to whether children need to be treated or can be released.
- When there is an accident the Police Department should take the tape of the bus into evidence to insure its preservation.
- A video of the accident should be made available to the public within 30 days, perhaps online as a download.
- The driver of any bus involved in an accident should have a urine analysis completed to determine any possible impairment including prescription and over the counter substances.
- Notification of the parents should be performed only after the police appear on scene so as to eliminate misinformation from the bus company.
- Any accident should be reviewed by the School Board to determine if it was avoidable and a report from the review should be posted online.

Mr. Nino stated that he feels that these changes will help insure the safety of the children and he would like this to be the first of many communications between himself, the administration, and the School Board.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Mr. Nino stated that all the buses have video and audio recordings.

In response to a question from Mr. Maresco, Mr. Nino stated that there was no video tape available from the accident in question.

Mr. Nino noted that the Board and other parents can contact him at AmherstParents@yahoo.com.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. Brew asked that the minutes of November 5, 2009 be pulled from the Consent Agenda.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

A MOTION was made by Mr. Bennett and SECONDED by Mr. Maresco to approve the consent agenda as follows:

B. Treasurer's Report

C. Donations

1. \$200.00
2. \$2,869.49

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Brew, and SECONDED by Mr. Maresco to approve the minutes of November 5, 2009 as amended.

Voting: 4 ayes; motion carried with Mr. Graybill abstaining.

A. FY09 Audit

Cheryl Stevensberg, of Melanson, Heath & Company, appeared before the Board and gave an overview of the annual financial statements produced by her firm. She stated that it was a very clean audit with no major issues and her firm gave the district a clean opinion which means that they believe that the district's financial statements are cleanly stated using accepted accounting practices. She also noted that the statement of net assets includes the new OPEB liability as is required.

Ms. Stevensberg then reviewed the Management Letter and noted that there are no new management letter comments and all the previously outstanding management letter comments have been resolved including the outstanding comment regarding student activity funds.

Ms. Shankel noted that it was a very clean audit and recognized the work of Katherine and Lisa Ambrosio who is no longer with the district.

Mr. Brew thanked everyone for their work at finally achieving a clean management letter.

B. FY11 Budget – 2nd Draft

1. Report from Ways & Means

Mark, of the Ways and Means Committee, stated that the Committee has been very busy and he thanked the administration for conducting the meetings and answering all their questions. He stated that the entire Committee met Monday night and reviewed the changes in the budget from draft 1 to draft 2 and they were very pleased. He commented on what a great job Jim Minor is doing in saving the tax payers a lot of money, especially with the renovations, and explained that as a result the District will be seeing savings in this budget and for years to come.

Mark explained that the Committee did not find any major changes with the

V. PRESENTATION

exception of the technology budget. He stated that the Committee discussed the replacement budget and the new equipment budget. He explained that the replacement budget reflects an automatic replacement at end of five years and the Committee would like to see an evaluation as to whether the equipment really needs to be replaced at the end of its life span; whether it has served its purpose and has been worth the cost. He further explained that the Committee looked at the new purchases also and they did not see enough information in the form of a comprehensive plan to be able to understand the purpose of the new equipment. He stated that the Committee passed two motions unanimously; the first of which continues to fund the replacement schedule fully and the second was to keep the new purchase budget at the FY10 level however no new purchases are to take place until a comprehensive plan is presented and approved by the Board.

Mark explained that the main drivers of the overall budget is the guaranteed maximum increase for the health insurance and an increase on the workers compensation of 9%, both of which not a lot can be done about.

Paul stated that he was very impressed that even though there is 22% increase in health insurance costs the overall increase is less than .82% because it is a very tight budget.

Mark stated that every department has had to be innovative with their budget and the work has shown through.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Ms. Shankel noted that there have been further adjustments and the increase currently is actually .69%. She also noted that one of the reasons that this is possible is due to the work of Jim Minor.

2. Board Deliberations

Mr. Graybill thanked the Ways and Means Committee for their effort and confirmed that the Committee is suggesting that the district continue the replacement of technology as it exists today and allocates funds for new technology but hold off on purchasing any until a new plan is seen. Paul explained that the idea is to determine an overall strategic plan for technology and noted that they are not suggesting that the money is not spent just that there should be a plan so the Board can see where the technology fits into the overall plan.

Ms. Head says that she appreciates the work the Ways and Means Committee as they do really go through the budget thoroughly. Mark noted that they enjoy the

work and that this Board is easy to work with.

Mr. Brew stated that he is very happy with where the overall number is and he thinks that the recommendation for the Board to review a rolling five year plan is a good one but he is still uncomfortable with the overall increase in the technology fund of 36%. He stated that in FY09 the budget was \$280,000, in FY10 it was \$250,000 and this year the proposal is for \$344,000. He noted that while this amount may be appropriate the Board does not know and has to approve the large increase on faith without a plan.

Ms. Shankel pointed out that last year there was quite a lot of cutting done by the Ways and Means Committee and the Board was very careful, especially considering the \$200,000 bond payment that was due last year. She further explained that they have tried to be careful over the last few years due to the renovations and they looked for areas of the budget that could be put off but now the District has 48 computers that were purchased five years ago through a grant that need to be replaced. She noted that this budget only includes the replacement of 24 of the units and she thinks that the suggestion of a five year rolling plan is a good one.

Ms. Heimarck noted that at the last SAU Board meeting she presented the new program review module and noted that phase 2 of that model is an action phase and one of the areas to be looked at is technology. She further explained that the action plan is designed to come to the School Board to communicate to the Board any multiyear commitments and at that time they will see how technology relates to specific programs in the schools.

Mr. Brew stated that while it seems appropriate to outline the plan and then request the funds it does not look like that happened previously and this year's funding is still a substantial increase from FY09.

Ms. Head expressed concerns about not being able to tell how the technology relates educationally, where the district is, where it is going, and what technology is needed to get there. She stated that she would like to make sure that the district is not just buying the new gizmo rather she wants to make sure that the purchases are worth the money and doing what they are supposed to do.

Ms. Shankel stated that she thinks the recommendation of the rolling five year plan is the best idea and she thinks the Board will find it to be a valuable practice.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Shankel stated that the plan will

look out for five years and see what the classroom will look like, lay out a path to get there, and show how the technology relates to the educational goals.

Ms. Heimarck noted that the plan would be always changing because the technology and the costs are always changing.

Mr. Brew stated that he wants to make sure that someone figures out what the cost of the paper vision is and make sure that it is actually attainable.

Paul stated that he is looking for a strategic justification for a short, mid, and long term vision as to how technology will be placed in the classroom to assist teachers or enhance the students experience to technological exposure.

Ms. Heimarck stated there is a vision and it is to build technology rich classrooms where relevant technology life skills are taught versus having children going to a lab.

Mr. Brew stated that he wants to make sure that the money being spent is in line with the vision.

Mr. Graybill stated that budgets seem to mean choosing between teachers, textbooks, or technology and suggested that at a future meeting the Board have a discussion as to the plans and objectives. He stated that he is concerned about a wave coming of expenses in the future that the Board is unaware of because some things have been put off. He stated he would also like to see how the vision for technology, teachers, and curriculum fit together to deliver an education to the students.

Dr. Jennings stated that the teaching plan is based on any new programming and class size and she thinks that the budget represents the programming they have asked for and the class size the Board has asked for. She also explained that the program review is where a lot of the textbooks come from and they will now start getting into technology such as software. She noted that even with the five year plan, the district may still not know the software that will be needed but they may be able to produce a minimal required percentage for the budget.

In response to a question from Mr. Maresco, Mr. Brew stated that the plan will be updated every year.

Paul suggested staying away from specific tool identification for instance state that the district wants to be able to bring internet exposure to the desk of the child and then confirm that the short term budgeting fits into the strategic vision.

Mr. Brew explained that he fears that the vision could end up not being implementable. He noted that he is okay with a changeable plan but if the plan does not identify the tool to be used then they cannot tell if the plan is practical.

Ms. Head asked the Board Members if they had anything additional to bring to the Board's attention regarding the budget and they did not.

Ms. Shankel submitted the proposed warrant articles for operating budget, the AEA agreement, and one in case the AEA agreement was defeated. She stated that the expendable trust for facilities is at an appropriate level and asked if the Board had any warrant articles they wanted to add. The Board did not.

In response to a question from Mark, Ms. Shankel explained that Article 14 allows the district the opportunity to renegotiate a contract that hopefully would pass at the special meeting if Article 13 were to fail.

Mr. Shankel reviewed the revenue projections and noted that she has not received the split projections from the state yet so she used split amounts from last year. She noted that she did not receive the split information from the state last year until December 22nd. She further explained that the proposed budget is \$161,000 higher than this year and that she expecting to receive similar amounts for state aid and federal aid. She noted that the local revenue will be a little higher because more Mont Vernon children will be attending the middle school. She stated that the tax increase currently would be \$.13 increase or a little over 1%.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Shankel explained that last year the Board returned all the remaining fund balance so money was returned which decreases the tax increase and makes this increase look higher.

C. Clark/Wilkins Response to Intervention Process

Mr. St. Amand explained that Clark/Wilkins has been involved in Response to Intervention for almost a full year and this year the team took time to meet with every single classroom teacher and review every child that the teachers had concerns about. He explained that he wanted to make sure that there was not an opportunity for any child to slip through the cracks and noted that it took more than a week in its entirety to meet with all the teachers. He also stated that they have a survey to give to teachers to see how the teachers felt about the process. Mr. St. Amand explained that the team recognized that the time constraint was more than they thought it would be but they plan on doing something similar at the end of the year. He explained that these meetings were targeted to kids about whom there are question and noted that often behavioral kids are identified at the

weekly Response To Intervention meetings. He state that at these meetings teachers can bring forward students with whom they have already implemented some strategies and adequate progress is not being made and then the individual students come to the team with parent notification.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. St. Amand explained that the meeting with the student could lead to additional support from the regular education teacher, interventions lead by a coach, or to an observation of the child.

Mr. St. Amand explained that in Tier 2, the staff is providing regular interventions and regularly accessing the progress of the interventions and if they are still not working the student is moved to Tier 3 which means something different happens perhaps different curriculum or special education diagnostics. He explained that if the responses are still not working the child would be referred to the Special Education department but the child would still be receiving interventions while the special education process is ongoing. He stated that this process empowers the regular education classroom teacher to the fact that they are the primary interventionist. He stated that the process is not complicated but it is labor intensive. He also noted that he is hopeful that the right interventions will lead to continued low special education numbers or even reduced the special education numbers.

A. SAU Lease

Ms. Shankel explained that the Board saw this lease last month, the SAU Board has seen it twice and the lawyers for the SAU and the Amherst School District approve of the lease. She also noted that the SAU has voted to enter into the lease and she would like this Board to approve the lease also.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Brew and SECONDED by Mr. Maresco to approve the lease and authorize the Chair to sign on behalf of the Board. Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

B. Policy IHBA – 2nd Reading

Dr. Jennings explained that this policy is about student evaluation and as of July 2009 was required.

Mr. Brew noted that he found it very useful to have the procedure in the packet even though the Board is just approving the policy.

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDED by Mr. Maresco to accept Policy IHBA.

VI. ACTION ITEMS

Voting 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

C. ARRA Technology Mini Grant

Ms. Heimarck stated that a team of 7th grade teachers, under the direction of Mr. Chakrin, applied for one of the competitive technology grants from the ARRA funds and won. She further explained that the grant is a \$10,000 mini technology grant that will be used to enhance and improve upon the grade level wide project by allowing students to make multimedia presentations using apple computers and apple software. She explained that she would like the Board to accept the funds tonight because OXFAM is already underway and the teachers are hoping to use the funds this year.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Shankel stated that these funds were included in the public hearing for the other ARRA funds.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Ms. Heimarck explained that the teachers are looking for students to produce videos about how an individual can make a difference in a global community. She explained that the funds would be used to purchase two Mac Books, the hardware to support them, and the software to support the students in making the multimedia videos.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Ms. Heimarck explained that that the \$10,000 will completely cover the software and hardware and \$2,500 is allocated to professional development as required by the grant.

Ms. Heimarck noted that Sam Giarrusso, Larry Ballard, Linda Farrington, Deb Hinrichs, and Porter Dodge were responsible for completing the grant application, which is time consuming, in the two week turn around period. She also noted that Mr. Chakrin has been in contact with the vendors and will be ready to make the purchase as soon as the Board approves the funds. Mr. Dodge noted that the teachers did the bulk of the work.

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDED by Mr. Graybill to accept the \$10,000 ARRA technical mini grant.

Voting: 4 ayes; motion carried with Mr. Maresco abstaining as his wife is chairing the OXFAM event.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Graybill and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to enter into non-public session according to RSA 91-A:3 II (a)

Voting: All members were polled and in favor; motion carried unanimously.

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

Chairman Head declared the Board to be in non-public session at 7:50 p.m.

The Administration presented Linda Field's request for sabbatical and discussed the value of the work as well as the rule outlined in the ASSA agreement.

The Administration presented non-union administrator salary information, which was discussed by the Board.

A MOTION was made by Ms. Head and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to return to public session.

Voting: All members were polled and were in favor; motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Head declared the Board to be in public session at 8:33 p.m.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Brew and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to grant Linda Field a sabbatical as requested for the purposes of researching the connection between creative and analytical skills and testing.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDED by Mr. Brew to approve \$16,453 in salary set aside for administrative costs in the 2010-2011 school year.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

Nancy Head encouraged the Board to take advantage of an upcoming opportunity to visit the schools on December 11th.

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDED by Mr. Maresco to adjourn the meeting.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Head declared the meeting to be adjourned at 8:42 p.m.

VIII. PUBLIC SESSION

IX. REVIEW OF MEETING/ADJOURN