

AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD

Minutes

December 4, 2008

Chairman Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Present

Amherst School Board: Chairman Dwight Brew, Peg Bennett, Peter de Bruyn Kops, Robert Graybill and Nancy Head.

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

Minutes Recorder: Heather Loewy Nichols

A. Principal's Report

The Board reviewed reports submitted by Mr. Dodge and Mr. St. Amand.

Chairman Brew called for public comment and heard none.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, the Board requested that the minutes be removed from the Consent Agenda.

A. Minutes

A MOTION was made by Ms. Head and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to approve the minutes of November 6, 2008 as amended.

Voting: 4 ayes; motion carried with Mr. Graybill abstaining as he was not at the meeting in question.

B. Treasurer's Report

C. Donations

1. Donations to AMS – Calculators
2. Donation to the Activity Fund \$406.70

D. Transfer

A MOTION was made by Mr. Graybill and SECONDED by Mr. de Bruyn Kops to approve Consent Agenda items B. Treasurer's Report, C. Donations, and D. Transfer.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

A. Melanson & Heath Auditor's Report

Sheryl Stephens-Burke from Melanson & Heath Auditor's Report reviewed the Amherst School District's annual financial statement for the year that ended June 30, 2008 prepared by her firm. She then reviewed the management letter prepared by

I. CALL TO ORDER

ATTENDANCE

II. ANNOUNCEMENTS

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

V. PRESENTATIONS/ DISCUSSION ITEMS

her firm for the District. She explained that the management letter includes the prior recommendations given to the District and their resolution status.

In response to a question from Mr. de Bruyn Kops regarding the previous recommendation to improve student activity fund policies and procedures, Ms. Stephens-Burke stated that while the administration has taken steps to improve the situation more supervision may be required.

Mr. Brew stated his appreciation that the Board received the report so early as it allows for the Board to enact improvements soon after the end of the fiscal year.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Shankel stated that the administration has given direction to the staff and had been doing sporadic checks but now they are going to have the SAU book keeper spend a day a month at each of the schools to do bank reconciliations and also review the other funds and procedure adherence.

The Board thanked Ms. Stephens-Burke for coming.

B. Music Program Update

Mr. Dodge thanked the Board for allowing him to speak to them on this issue. He made a presentation entitled a "Brief history of the music program, what has been done, why some changes have been made and the problems they present." He explained that last month parents and teachers expressed their concerns and while he was unprepared to address the issue at the time he was glad to address it now. Mr. Dodge reviewed the previous and current schedules and explained the drawbacks of the previous schedule. He explained that a new flexible schedule was created in order to deal with the drawbacks but it left the school in non compliance with some special education plans and made band and chorus difficult. He further explained that this year they changed the flex period to a literacy period and added a PE class to the schedule, which provided the Special Education department with a concrete schedule that allowed them to meet the students' needs, and moved band and chorus from literacy periods to integrated arts periods. He explained the impacts of the new schedule including that students in band or chorus only participate one day a week without the full group, integrated arts periods were reduced from 30 to 24 classes, and students and teachers struggle with make up work completion. Mr. Dodge reviewed the current music enrollment numbers stating that there are 379 students enrolled in band and chorus which is a decrease from last year. Mr. Dodge further explained that a committee has been formed consisting of concerned citizens, music students, Special Education staff, staff members from Amherst Middle School and Souhegan High School, and administration. with the goal of implementing any changes by January 22nd.

Susan Abis thanked Mr. Dodge for the presentation and for meeting with the parents and noted that the graph presented is misleading because it looked like music classes were added to the schedule but this is not accurate as the ensemble does not meet as a whole. In response to a question from Ms. Abis, Mr. Dodge stated that he is not in favor of the before and afterschool program but he did not represent other schools that have band during the middle of the day because those schools have study halls. In response to another question from Ms. Abis, Dr. Jennings explained that the district is in the third year of a five year strategic plan focusing on literacy which is not language arts but rather understanding language coding which will increase scores in all areas of academics.

Daymond Steer, of the Milford Cabinet, appeared before the Board and asked for further explanation regarding the current schedule. Mr. Dodge stated that instead of being able to take students out of a flex period as happened last year, this year students need to miss another integrated arts program 20% of the time in order to participate in band or music. Dr. Jennings explained that the district is trying to give the middle school students a good general education with a lot of choices but it creates a complicated schedule and forces some students to make choices between classes or to miss some classes.

In response to questions from Mr. Brew, Mr. Dodge explained that he feels that any changes need to be implemented by Jan 22nd as this is the half way point to the year and he will come back to the Board with a report as to what changes they will be implementing.

In response to a question from Dr. Jennings, Mr. Brew stated that it is important that students not get penalized for missing classes and questioned how this can be accomplished. Mr. de Bruyn Kops stated that he does not fully understand what a literacy period is suggested that there is a point in the middle where a student can still get the value of literacy periods without having them 180 days a year. He also noted that he is comfortable with the band and chorus participants not having to take general music education classes.

C. FY10 Budget – Draft #2

Dr. Jennings thanked the members of the Ways and Means Committee and the administration for meeting for 4.5 hours this week. She presented a revised FY10 budget to the to the Board and noted that it includes the preschool as an out of district cost as the committee felt that this was not the appropriate year to take the risk of bringing that program in district. She explained that the budget now represents a 3.3% increase even though the District had a 5% increase in labor costs, a 20% increase in retirement costs, a 2.5% increase in inflation for supplies, and a 10% increase in insurance costs. She reviewed further cuts that could be taken to

bring the budget to a 1.98% increase noting that some of these cuts include some risk and delaying some scheduled repairs and purchases. Ms. Shankel explained that if the Board approved all the proposed cuts the budget would increase but due to the projected revenue the tax impact would decrease.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Dr. Jennings explained that the committee suggested reducing the substitute budget because in the last two years they have had a lot of staff out with family issues and long term health issues but they do not foresee as many issues coming up this year.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Renea Sparks explained that there have been changes to students' IEP's since October that allow for a decrease in the budget.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Dr. Jennings stated that the scheduled computer replacements are included in the budget but they are proposing removing additional purchases.

Ms. Head stated that she would hate to see the gym roof replacement and the wheelchair ramp removed from the budget because these items are part of the renovation package which qualifies for state aid and she does not want to risk jeopardizing the aid. Ms. Shankel stated that she is hoping the repairs will be covered with the surplus fund from this year and next year. Mr. Brew and Ms. Head discussed the proposed renovation cuts.

In response to a question from Mr. de Bruyn Kops, Ms. Shankel stated that the three digital cameras have been removed from the Kindergarten budget.

In response to a suggestion from Mr. de Bruyn Kops, Mr. Brew explained that the plan was to budget for all the current bus routes and take some of those funds to pay for an optimization study which would cost about half of the cost of a bus route in hopes that the study would be able to remove at least one route and therefore pay for itself. In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Ms. Shankel stated that she does not foresee that the possible later start time would affect the bus routes.

Mr. Brew stated that he is concerned that any cost savings of adding staff instead of out sourcing OT Special Education services may not save money in the long run. In response to this concern, Ms. Sparks explained that having an in house OT person on staff would lead to more continuity for services, meetings, and reporting and would also allow for a possible further reduction in contracted services if any further OT reductions were needed in students' IEPs. The Board discussed these two options. In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Mr. Mark Vincent and Steve Cummings, of the Ways and Means Committee stated that they are in favor of continuing to use

contracted Occupational Therapy Services. The Board agreed that they would rather continue contracting OT services.

Mr. Vincent and Mr. Cummings expressed concern about removing the roof replacement from the budget. Ms. Shankel stated that the roof is not in dire need but does need to be replaced and therefore it would be one of the first items that would be covered if there is a surplus. Mr. Brew noted that there is still \$100,000 in the expendable fund for repairs if needed.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Ms. Shankel stated that the potential surplus for this year has not been earmarked for anything at this time. Mr. Brew suggested that if there is any surplus this year, the Board may want to not only look at financing the items being cut from next year's operating budget, but also look at purchasing some of the items included in next year's operating budget to build a small reserve, because next year's budget is so tight.

Mr. Vincent expressed his concern about removing the wheelchair lift and roof repair from the budget because these repairs are high priority and there may be more than one difficult year and more repairs will be needed next year.

In response to a question from Steve, Nicole Heimarck explained that there is a lot of competition for the current projectors and the science teachers need them a lot, especially for the new more hands on science curriculum. In response to a comment by Mr. de Bruyn Kops, Ms. Heimarck stated that the standard cost of books to implement the new curriculum is significantly less as 75% of the funds needed would be used to purchase tools not books.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill regarding the new literacy program pilot that is included in the budget, Nicole Heimarck submitted a packet to the Board with details about the program. She explained that while the program is being piloted in Mont Vernon, she and Nancy McGuire are supervising the project and they are looking out for the entire SAU. She explained that the administration chose to pilot the program in Mont Vernon because research shows that programs should be piloted in one school at a time and because some of the Mont Vernon teachers already have experience with the program and the others were ready to accept it. She also submitted an implementation plan to the Board for Month Vernon Village School, Clark/Wilkins School and the Amherst Middle School. She reviewed benefits of a core reading program. In response to a question from the Ways and Means Committee she explained that this program includes both quantitative and qualitative assessments such as NWEA, Dibels, and the collecting of weekly student and teacher data. In response to a question from the Board she stated that the cost of full implantation is \$221,000 over the next four years. She also explained that this

is based on this years cost per pupil and the average yearly increase is 3-8%. She noted that piloting Kindergarten through 2nd grade only for the next two to three years would cost \$92,000. In response to a question from Mr. de Bruyn Kops, Ms. Heimarck explained that a partial implementation is included in the FY10 budget although she noted that implementation has been cut back to no longer include 2nd grade next year.

Ms. Head questioned a change in the administration at the Elementary School and received an explanation of the change from Mr. St. Amand. Mr. Brew expressed concern that assistant principal changes occurred without the knowledge of the Board and would like communication from the administration when these high level staffing positions change.

D. Warrant Articles

Ms. Shankel submitted a first draft of the proposed warrant articles for the upcoming vote. In response to a question from the Board, she explained that the administration has been posting the tallies of support or non support on the warrant articles but it appears that they may not be allowed to unless the proposed warrant article passes.

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDED by Ms. Head to go into non public session. Members of the Board were polled and all voted in favor. The Board entered into non public session at 8:35 p.m.

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

A. AEA Retirements

The Board discussed salary set aside amounts for non-union employee raises and discussed the 14.4 clause in the AEA contract.

VII. ACTION ITEMS

A MOTION was made by Mr. de Bruyn Kops and SECONDED by Mr. Graybill to come out of non-public session.

The Board was polled and all were in favor.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Graybill and SECONDED by Mr. de Bruyn Kops to offer five 14.4 retirements this year in accordance with the AEA Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

VIII. PUBLIC SESSION

A MOTION was made by Mr. de Bruyn Kops and SECONDED by Ms. Head to adjourn.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

**IX. REVIEW OF
MEETING/
ADJOURNMENT**

Chairman Brew declared the meeting adjourned at 9:10pm.