

AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD

May 7, 2009

Approved 06/04/09

MINUTES

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

I. CALL TO ORDER

Present

Amherst School Board: Dwight Brew, Peg Bennett, Peter Maresco (left at 8:45 p.m.), Rob Graybill and Nancy Head.

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

Minutes Recorder: Heather Loewy Nichols

ATTENDANCE

Chairman Head called for public comment.

II. PUBLIC TIME

A small group of parents appeared before the Board and expressed their concern and frustration at the way students from the sixth grade are being placed in the various seventh grade math options. They noted that only a small group of advanced students were placed in Integrated Math, while the mid-high range students were grouped with all the other students including those that are struggling in math. They stated that they would like to have a separate curriculum plan for the mid-high range students so they have the ability to take Calculus by the end of their High School career.

Dr. Jennings stated that she has taken notes on their ideas and assumptions and will do some research for the parents and then Ms. Heimarck will respond to the parents as originally promised.

A. Presentation

Chairman Head presented Mr. Brew with a gavel in appreciation of his three years of integrity and skill as Chairman of the Board.

B. Principals' Reports

Chairman Head stated that the Board received the principal's reports in their packets and asked if there were any questions.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Mr. St. Amand stated that the meeting regarding schools in need of improvement is on May 21st and currently only principals have been invited, however he just received an email which

III. ANNOUNCEMENTS

stated that another person can come and he would like to bring a math coach.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Mr. St. Amand stated that NECAP Science testing will occur on May 14th for fourth graders only.

In response to a question from Ms. Head, Mr. St. Amand stated that the NWEA testing occurs in two sessions that vary per student from 20 to 90 minutes.

Mr. Brew noted that he has heard that not all the students are putting their best effort into the test and he has also heard a suggestion that the scores be put on the students' report cards. Dr. Jennings stated that she has also heard that suggestion at the High School.

Mr. Graybill stated that he thought the administration handled the swine flu and the related communication well and he appreciates the effort. Mr. St. Amand noted that the response from parents has been much less demanding than anticipated. Mr. Jennings noted that the CDC has decided that the school no longer needs to close if there is a verified or possible case of swine flu.

C. Superintendent Update on Stimulus

Dr. Jennings explained that the district should be receiving \$250,000 through IDEA funds of which some funds they will possibly be able to use for regular education. She also noted that the district will be receiving a minimum of \$53,000 in the next year for Response to Intervention and differentiated instruction. She noted that the first step will be to provide SAU wide "training the trainers" in differentiated instruction. She also noted that the Amherst School received \$13,000 in preschool funds.

D. Committees

1. Assignments

The Board reviewed and agreed to the proposed committee assignments.

2. Communications Report

Mr. Graybill explained that the Communications Committee met three times for active and vocal meetings and he feels that they are now making progress. He is hoping to have a draft version available by the next Board meeting.

3. Master Plan Report

Ms. Head explained that the 2009 renovations have started, the crew is working at night and putting the ceilings and everything back and cleaning up before the students come to school. Mr. St. Amand stated the overall experience has been great and he has heard no complaints.

In response to a question from Chairman Head, the Board pulled the April minutes, the ASA agreement, Transfers, and the Tuition agreement from the consent agenda.

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

A MOTION was made by Mr. Graybill and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to accept the consent agenda a follows:

B. Treasurer's Reports

1. March 2009

2. April 2009

D. Activity Fund Donations

E. Leave of Absence Request

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Graybill and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to accept the minutes April 2009 as amended.

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

C. Transfers

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDED by Mr. Graybill to approve the Transfers.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Ms. Shankel stated that the over expenditure was on the paving because the cost of petroleum had gone up.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Mr. St. Amand stated that the funds for the library were related to furniture not audio visual equipment.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

F. Tuition Agreement

Mr. Brew noted that the Department of Education required that some changes be made to the language agreement and reviewed the changes. Ms. Shankel stated that she has the corrected copies to be signed tonight.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Brew and SECONDED by Mr. Graybill to approve the 10 year tuition agreement with Mont Vernon including the changes as outlined.

Voting: 5 ayes; motion carried.

G. ASSA Agreement

Ms. Shankel explained that there are a couple of clarifications that need to be made with counsel so the agreement will be put on next month's agenda.

A. AYP Report

Ms. Heimarck reminded the Board that Adequate Yearly Progress is a Federal law and the New Hampshire statute is concerned with both the whole school and its sub groups. She stated that all students need to be proficient by 2013 and noted that this it not a realistic goal as not all children have the ability to reach grade level expectation. She noted that the index target increases every two years and this year for Amherst the index target was 86 in reading and 82 in math and next year's goal is 91 in reading and 88 in math. She then explained the three possible ways to achieve AYP which include cleanly, Safe Harbor, and Confidence Interval. She further noted that a school becomes a School In Need of Improvement when the school misses the target in the same subgroup and content subject for two years. Ms. Heimarck then explained the index to the Board.

In response to a question from Mr. Maresco, Mr. Heimarck stated that sub groups under 11 students are not indexed and the point of the legislation is to tease out the smaller groups because they feel that all the groups deserve the same attention. She noted that the data needs to be analyzed at the micro level to see if there are simple issues or there is a larger achievement gap issue.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Ms. Hiemarck noted that Amherst is not a District In Need of Improvement because they have not missed AYP for reading in two consecutive years.

In response to a question from Mr. Brew, Ms. Heimarck noted that Amherst Middle School had one of the highest indexes in the state and, while sustainability is important, once you are so high you can only go so much higher.

In response to Ms. Head, Ms. Heimarck stated that the Curriculum Administrators are working on the Root Cause Analysis as required and then a team will be created to consider solutions.

Mr. St. Amand noted that Clark School and Wilkins School need to be referred to as a unit because it is a school unit and people need to keep this in mind because it all starts in Kindergarten. He also stated that they also need to review whether the tier 3 students are getting the interventions they need.

Ms. Heimarck explained that next steps include groups from Amherst and Mont Vernon going to training from the state, obtaining and reviewing more data, and starting the Data Root Cause Analysis process in June. She also noted that she does not make decisions based on one data point.

I. PRESENTATIONS

Mr. Brew stated that he would like to see a plan that will at least increase the scores, hopefully at the next meeting.

B. AMS Scheduling

Mr. Dodge explained that the second year of flex schedule is coming to an end and it has mostly been positive but does need a few changes.

He reviewed the changes as follows:

- Putting 50 minutes back into the core
- Grade 5 will have 90 consecutive minutes in reading and language arts
- Wellness class will be a combination of PE and Health for a total of 90 days
- World Language will be offered in Grades 6,7,and 8, with students choosing their language at the end of fifth grade
- Grade 5 will have one integrated arts period per six day rotation
- 2 days of band, chorus, or General Music per six day rotation
- 2 days of Art per six day rotation
- Grade 6 will have two Integrated Arts periods

(Mr. Maresco left the meeting)

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Mr. Dodge stated that the faculty has responded very well to the proposed changes. Dr. Jennings noted that this is important due to contract negotiation issues. Mr. Dodge noted that he did get favorable response from the associations.

C. FY09 Quarterly Report

Ms. Shankel reviewed the FY09 Quarterly report. She noted that there is a decrease in the revenue due to lower interest rates. She also noted that the projected Catastrophic Aid is lower than budgeted but this is made up by an increase in Medicaid. In total the revenue is under budget by \$150,000. On the expense side, Ms. Shankel explained that the teacher salary line is under budget by \$130,000, Special Education had some unanticipated Extended Year Service expenses but they are offset by an IDEA grant. She also noted that the out of district expenses are under budget by \$20,000. She further reviewed the School Administration Services, Employee Benefits, Debt Interest, and Food Service budgets. In total, she stated, the district is under budget by \$400,000.

A. Vote- SAU Lease

A MOTION was made by Mr. Brew and SECONDED by Ms. Bennett to approve the lease agreement from July 2009 to June 2010 of the Brick School to the SAU.

Voting: 4 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

II. ACTION ITEMS

A. Follow-up Math Presentation

Ms. Heimarck explained that research has found that sixth grade is the most appropriate time to vertically accelerate children in math because this is when their abstract thinking becomes more apparent during this time. She explained that, with the help of the mathematics coach, the teachers look at the student data to see where some gaps exist and create a compacted curriculum so the accelerated students are taught the missing skills in addition to the Integrated I curriculum. She noted that the accelerated students are identified as students who can move through the math content and skills at a faster pace and therefore they can learn 1 ½ years of teaching in 1 year. Ms. Heimarck further explained that while looking at NWEA data some common gaps were found in the vertically accelerated students which allows the teachers to create a curriculum. She also noted that pre-assessment tests are used.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Ms. Heimarck explained that that in seventh grade there are three levels of math: 7th grade, 1 year (receiving 8th grade instruction) and 2 year (receiving Integrated 1).

Mr. Maresco stated that it seems like a two year jump is an extreme change and that he does not put a lot of faith in standardized testing. He stated that he would like to see a smoother transition that started in sixth grade. He also noted that there is a group of children who were all in the advanced class and all got A's but they were then placed in all three levels of seventh grade math.

Dr. Jennings stated that she is not sure that leveling is the answer.

In response to a question from Ms. Bennett, Dr. Jennings stated that the school would not be able to change to a three track system before September.

Mr. Graybill suggested that the tracks are appropriate as they are but the percentage of the children in each track is the real issue. He suggested that the groups be recalibrated.

Dr. Jennings stated that she will bring the scores and placement numbers to the board.

In response to a question from Mr. Graybill, Ms. Hiemark stated that a winter NWEA testing session was added to determine the rubric score but it could be changed by the spring NWEA score or even the NWEA given in fall of 2009.

The Board discussed the public comment procedure.

III. DISCUSSION

IV. REVIEW OF

Mr. Graybill asked if it was possible for presenters to let the Board know what the presenter is expecting from the Board before the presentation starts.

**MEETING/
ADJOURN**

A MOTION was made by Ms. Bennett and SECONDD by Mr. Graybill to adjourn the meeting.

Voting: 4 ayes; motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Head declared the meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.