

Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee Meeting
April 12, 2016
Library, Amherst Regional High School

IN ATTENDANCE:

Trevor Baptiste, Chair
Stephen Sullivan
Phoebe Hazzard
Katherine Appy
Emily Marriott
Vira Douangmany Cage
Laura Kent
Kip Fonsh
Anastasia Ordonez
Josiah Vasquez, Student Representative

Michael Morris, Assistant Principal
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Jo Ann Smith, Special Education Administrator
Kathryn Mazur, Human Resources Director
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
Marisa Mendonsa, ARMS Principal
Jean Fay, APEA President
Matthew Vendetti, ARMS Teacher
Denise Boyd, ARMS Teacher
Alicia Lopez, ARMS Teacher
Deb King, Pelham Teacher

1. Welcome and Approve Minutes 6:03 p.m.

Mr. Baptiste called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. and welcomed the two new members of the Committee, Laura Kent and Anastasia Ordonez. He then noted that the ARMS student presentation will be moved to the beginning of the meeting so the students can get home as early as possible.

Mr. Fonsh moved to approve the minutes of March 8, 2016 and March 22, 2016. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. ARMS Student Presentation—Indigenous Peoples Day 6:06 p.m.

Amherst Regional Middle School students Lucy Anderson, Melinda Medwinter-Rampersad, Xiaoping Yu, Jesse Barker-Plotkin, Sophia Jodka and Hillary Atkinson gave a presentation regarding their school project that led them to submit a warrant article to the Amherst Town Meeting in May requesting that Columbus Day be changed to Indigenous Peoples Day. Mr. Morris noted that two of the students gave this presentation to the Amherst Select Board last night, which unanimously voted to support the warrant article. Mr. Fonsh moved that the School Committee vote to draft a letter in support the efforts of the students to change the name of Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day. Ms. Appy seconded and discussion followed. Mr. Fonsh's motion was then unanimously approved. Ms. Douangmany Cage moved to change the name "Columbus Day" to "Indigenous Peoples" day on the school calendar. Ms. Hazzard seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Mr. Morris and Mr. Baptiste recognized the students' teachers, particularly Mr. Vendetti, who worked with them on this topic and presentation. Mr. Vendetti thanked the School Committee, acknowledging the excellent work of the students.

3. Public Comments 6:27 p.m.

Peter Demling, ARMS parent, stated that his subjective assessment based on personal experience is that the Middle School is in crisis. He noted that the School Committee should be skeptical of his word, but also skeptical of that of the administration. He asked that the School Committee do three things: 1) Make teacher survey results public as soon as possible in the raw version; 2) talk directly to teachers; and 3) welcome and encourage teachers to speak publicly without fear of retribution. Alfie Alschuler, community member, noted that he is concerned about the number of initiatives that are being done at the same time in the middle school, stating that they are wasting money and are not being well implemented. He stated that the teachers are feeling overwhelmed. Natan Cohen, ARHS alumni, submitted and read a letter to the School Committee and Superintendent Geryk regarding a stay away order against Aisha Hiza (attached), which he then read. Mr. Baptiste thanked Mr. Cohen, noting that he did not want to be rude, but this is not the Board that can respond to the issue about which he spoke. Michael Mongeau, community member, noted that he also wants to speak about the same issue. Mr. Baptiste stopped Mr. Mongeau, noting that the concern has been recorded and stated that he does not want to continue to take time from this Board since this is not an issue over which the Board has purview. Members of the audience expressed their belief that they have a right to speak on this issue during public comment time. Mr. Baptiste stated that the message has been sent and has been recorded into the record, publicly and privately, and he does not want to turn this into a soap box about an issue over which the board does not have purview taking time away from the important business over which they do have purview. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked if there is an official district response to this complaint because she has not received anything. Mr. Baptiste noted that he does not know of one. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked what the members can officially say when members of the public ask to speak to them about this issue. Mr. Baptiste noted that members of the public can speak to elected officials about anything they want to; however, he does not want to take time for the meeting for issues that are not on the agenda. He said he does not want to be characterized as cutting off public discourse since this comment has been made

about this issue. Ms. Douangmany Cage said that she is privy to a letter from Attorney Regina Tate, who represents the district, to the Pelham School Committee and asked if Mr. Baptiste has read the letter. Mr. Baptiste said he has not. He noted that he is not taking advice from an attorney; he simply does not want a Pelham issue to dominate the Regional School Committee meeting when it has already been heard. Ms. Appy noted that she can tell from the letter and the number of people here that this is a very difficult and painful issue, but the policy is that the Regional School Committee hears comment about Regional issues. Her understanding is that this is an issue in Pelham. Members of the audience noted that Ms. Hiza has been banned from all district schools/buildings so this is also a Regional issue. Mr. Baptiste stated that because Ms. Hiza has been banned from all schools, it could be a Regional issue; however, his point is that the protest and concern has been noted and he does not want this meeting to turn into an adjudication of that. Ms. Anderson commented from the audience that it is public comment and they have a right to speak. Mr. Baptiste stated that the board cannot hear, discuss in public or make judgment about a complaint against their employee, the chief executive officer of the district. He noted that, respectfully, he does not want to take time from other agenda items since the board cannot satisfy in public what the audience is hoping to achieve. At the audience's urging, Mr. Baptiste allowed further comment. Mr. Mongeau noted that Ms. Hiza has received a letter from the school district stating that she cannot speak to the School Committee about her issue; therefore, she could not be here to speak tonight about the stay away order that was issued. Mr. Baptiste noted that, as Chair, he can speak to issues very briefly. He noted that when he is out in public people know that they can come and speak to him about any issue. He said he is completely open and available but he has no comment about anything that has happened, nor should he. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that, as a School Committee member she would like to understand the policy regarding stay away orders. Kathleen Anderson, former School Committee member, suggested that, in recognition of Indigenous People, the National Day of Mourning recognized by the First Nations on the fourth Thursday of November should be recognized by the School Committee. Markeesha Davis, community member, noted that she has been celebrating the letter written by the four Wildwood Students regarding the Black Lives Matter movement. She stated that "silence is violence" and strips people of the ability to self-advocate, noting that a concerned parent has had her voice silenced. Kate Atkinson, parent, thanked the School Committee for listening so respectfully and voting to support the students' proposal regarding Indigenous Peoples Day. She noted that she felt she had to speak since her older child had a wonderful experience in the middle school, but her daughter's current experience has not been as wonderful due to budget cuts. Discussion returned to the issue of what the policy is with regard to stay away orders. Mr. Baptiste asked Ms. Westmoreland if there is a policy regarding this matter, and she stated that there is not one. Ms. Appy noted that it is not in the School Committee authority. Mr. Baptiste noted that if there is no policy, things defer to Massachusetts General Law. He said he really cannot speak on this, but the Policy Subcommittee can look into making a policy around this issue so things do not appear to be done willy-nilly, as can happen when there is no policy to guide decisions. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that as elected officials she believes the School Committee body is ultimately responsible for any actions taken against a family. Mr. Baptiste stated that no one has ever been told, to the best of his knowledge that they cannot speak to him. He said if that is true, he would not say he would not listen because of that. Mr. Baptiste noted that he is not a lawyer but he does not believe that anyone can tell anyone else they cannot speak to an elected official. He said he is trying to be very careful not to cut the process short or to pre-judge our Superintendent or take any action that would be perceived as a judgment against her. Mr. Baptiste said it is completely within the purview of the School Committee to put discussion of a policy on an agenda. For the record, Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that it is important to craft a clear policy around what is required for a stay away order to be put in place and what the process is for resolving such an order. She noted that such an action should always be a last result and it would behoove us to resolve this as quickly as possible. Mr. Baptiste noted that he agrees. Mr. Mongeau noted that the order has been revised to allow the parent to drop off and pick up her child but not from school grounds. Mr. Baptiste noted that he is so trying not to judge to which Ms. Anderson replied that she would be happy to judge then. Mr. Baptiste stated that he does not want her to judge for them either, but what he wants to do is ensure that all aspects of our system are in meeting with the direction of our mission in a way that is unimpeachable. He said that as a body the committee must be especially careful about pre-judging or making decisions without all information. He said the most he can offer is that this is not unseen, unheard or untalked about but the remedy for this is to have the staying power for this requires a process to be played out. Ms. Anderson stated that, since there is no policy in place, it seems the School Committee can encourage its employee to withdraw the stay away order and return the parent's parental rights. Mr. Baptiste stated that may be part of the process, but it would not be something that would ever be discussed in public. It is part of the relationship between the elected officials of the School District and the managers of the district. Mr. Baptiste noted that the issue of such a policy can be put on a future agenda. A member of the public asked if there will be repercussions for the parent if she speaks to school committee members. Mr. Baptiste noted that he is not a lawyer but he would never refuse to speak to anybody. He said he never directed the school's lawyer to say such a thing. Mr. Baptiste stated that no one can tell him who he can and cannot speak to, and it is up to the parent to decide if she is comfortable speaking to school committee members. Ms. Douangmany Cage said it may be obvious that members of the Pelham School Committee have not seen the letter from the attorney, which was copied to Pelham Chair Tara Luce and Kathryn Mazur. Mr. Baptiste stated that he has not seen the letter. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that it is important for the Pelham School Committee members to see the letter. Mr. Baptiste noted that the "happy valley lawyer intimidation" is beyond his scope. He said he is a person and lawyers cannot tell him what to do. He said he cannot speak to or advise the parent on what she should do. Ms. Douangmany Cage said the letter was sent on his

behalf as a Pelham School Committee member, and Mr. Baptiste noted that he will need to discuss this with his Chair but would not be discussing it with the public.

4. New and Continuing Business

7:11 p.m.

A. 7-12 Consolidation Report

Ms. Mazur provided a brief overview of the 7-12 Consolidation Report that was developed after exploring the potential consolidation of the middle and high schools. She noted that, based on community feedback, it is not clear that a consolidation is the right step. Mr. Fonsh noted that one of the many things that concerns him is what he believes is an enormous gap between the elected officials and the general public in the understanding of the financial situation of the schools. He suggested that replicating the Regionalization Task Force that worked on the 7-12 Regionalization study for the consolidation study could help address the lack of awareness about the financial crisis, as well as help people feel ownership of whatever decision is made. Ms. Kent asked if the option of moving the South East Campus program upstairs to the middle school would still be on the table. Ms. Mazur noted that space in the middle school is not being used efficiently at this time, and could potentially be combined in a way to allow the building to be utilized in a positive way. Ms. Ordonez stated that it might be helpful to have a side-by-side budget matrix of the different scenarios to help the greater public to understand the implications. She noted that she would be happy to help with such a document. Mr. Sullivan stated that Shutesbury supports the arts, but they are not supportive of paying for the building to be used as a public arts building. He noted that it would need to be self-sustaining in order for Shutesbury to support it. Ms. Mazur said that this would be the goal. Mr. Fonsh noted that there are other regionalization conversations beginning, including the possibility of Union 28 forming a Region, as well as Amherst, Leverett and Pelham discussing an elementary Region.

B. Later Start Time Exploration

Ms. Appy stated that she is one of the people pushing to have the topic of later start times back on the agenda due to the overwhelming amount of evidence regarding benefits for adolescents. She noted that the Committee came very close to changing the start time when the issue was explored in 2010, but there were still a number of things to work out including athletics and the elementary start time. Mr. Baptiste said this has been slow to come back to the agenda due to the number of initiatives underway. He said he believes the way to move forward is to have conversations about how we want the school system to look as a whole. Ms. Appy noted that when the issue was explored before, secondary parents were overwhelming in favor of a later start time. She encouraged the School Committee members to review the report that has already been done, noting that Regionalization and consolidation seem somewhat stalled so she would not want later start times to be stalled, too. Ms. Marriott noted that later start times seems like one of the most positive steps that could be taken due to the benefits to students. Ms. Kent said it might be beneficial to have current input from the Athletic Director regarding the impact, as well as a possible outside evaluation of our current transportation program. She noted that the evidence is compelling from a public health standpoint. Mr. Morris noted that extra-curricular activities, sports, and transportation are the three things that come to the forefront as issues for most districts when later start times are considered. He noted that reengaging parents with the discussion will be important, as will working with people in the field who have implemented later start times and can provide assistance. Mr. Baptiste noted that he believes the way to move forward is to gather input from stakeholder groups and to develop a matrix such as Ms. Ordonez suggested for the 7-12 consolidation. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that The Collaborative is an excellent resource for this work, including surveys.

C. Policies

- **GBGC: Weapons in the Workplace**

Ms. Appy explained that the Policy Subcommittee made the changes discussed by the Regional School Committee and reviewed those changes. Ms. Appy moved to accept Policy GBGC: Weapons in the Workplace. Ms. Hazzard seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

- **ECAA: Use of Cameras**

Ms. Appy explained that the Policy Subcommittee made the changes discussed by the Regional School Committee and reviewed those changes. She noted that she discussed this policy with the Student Advisory Council today. Ms. Marriott moved to approve Policy ECAA, Ms. Ordonez seconded and discussion followed. Ms. Ordonez asked if there is any requirement for parental consent before a video would be released to law enforcement since the students are minors. Mr. Morris explained that there are laws in place with regard to what can be released to law enforcement and there is a standard of care that must be followed. Ms. Douangmany Cage stated that she believes the guidelines for enforcing the policy should be approved by the School Committee. Ms. Appy suggested tabling the motion and returning the policy to the Policy Subcommittee to discuss the question of parental consent. Ms. Marriott then retracted her motion.

- **JKAA: Physical Restraint and Behavior Support**

Ms. Appy noted that there were not any changes to this Policy since the first reading. Ms. Hazzard moved to approve Policy JKAA. Ms. Marriott seconded and discussion followed. Ms. Kent noted that she believes it is important to include language consistent with the DESE advisory regarding inclusionary and exclusionary time out and the requirement that restraint not be included in a student's IEP. She suggested returning this to the Policy Subcommittee for that language. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that there was a reference in the Amherst Police Log recently about a police officer being brought into a time out room to calm down a student. She said that if this is not addressed in this policy, perhaps a separate policy should be developed. Ms. Hazzard withdrew her motion and this policy will be returned to the Policy Subcommittee.

- **GC: SEI Endorsement Requirement**

Ms. Appy reviewed the reasons the policy regarding SEI (Sheltered English Immersion) training is needed, and Mr. Morris explained the DESE requirements for teachers to be trained. Mr. Morris noted that the district received its license today to offer the SEI training in-district. Ms. Marriott suggested that the specific dates in the final paragraph should not be included since they will render the policy outdated once they have passed. After discussion regarding potential rewording without specific dates, it was agreed that the Policy Subcommittee will work on the language for a second reading of this policy in May.

5. School Committee Planning **8:40 p.m.**

Future Agenda Topics: Policy regarding stay away orders/building security; conversations with the community

6. Accept Gifts **8:42 p.m.**

Ms. Ordonez moved to accept \$300 from El Camalito, Inc. for the Family Center; \$250 from Shirley J. Musumeci for the Leo P. Vigneault Memorial Award; and \$300 from La Veracruz for the Family Center. Ms. Kent seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Morris recognized Mr. Fonsh since this is his last meeting as the Leverett representative to the Regional School Committee, acknowledging his great service to the community. Ms. Appy expressed appreciation for Mr. Fonsh's wisdom and his work, noting that he will be missed. Mr. Baptiste thanked Mr. Fonsh for his particularly measured, respectful comments and for his service.

5. Adjournment **8:46 p.m.**

Mr. Fonsh moved to adjourn at 8:46 p.m. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland

April 12, 2016

Dear Superintendent Geryk and the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee,

We the undersigned are former students of the Amherst-Pelham Regional School System (the School System) and are former and current residents of Hampshire County. We make this statement as a sign of solidarity for Aisha Hiza, who has been barred from attending this meeting, and her daughter, a student of your school system.

We are dismayed by the actions of agents of the School System. What began as a mother's attempt to protect her daughter from violent bullying, motivated by racial discrimination, has spiraled into a violation of Aisha and her daughter's civil, educational and parental rights. The actions of the School System culminated in a Stay Away Order (hereafter "The Order,") from Superintendent Maria Geryk presented to Aisha via her personal email account on March 15th, 2016. Aisha's attempts to obtain due process and speak with Ms. Geryk have not been addressed, rendering her voiceless before the School System. The attempts to silence Aisha have not gone unnoticed.

Your mission is "The academic achievement of every student learning in a system dedicated to social justice and multiculturalism." We ourselves were once students taught by this school system and it is clear to us that recent actions taken by the school system are in direct opposition to this mission. We call on the school board to 1) immediately lift any orders against Aisha blocking her from exercising her first amendment rights, adequately caring for her child, and interacting with her daughter's schooling and 2) for the committee to undertake a full investigation into actions against Aisha and her family.

We as a community stand strong behind Aisha and her daughter and will look forward to the swift resolution of this matter.

Sincerely, the undersigned,



Lauren A. Burke, Esq,	Fort River Elementary School (1996), ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002)
Abbey Patteson	Mark's Meadow (1996), A.R.M.S (1998) A.R.H.S (2002)
Siena Kaplan-Thompson	Fort River Elementary School (1996), ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002)
Kathryn M. Averill	Fort River Elementary School (1996), A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Candice Connors	A.R.H.S 2002
Nadia Tafreshi	Marks Meadow Elementary (1996), A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Oleg Topic	ARMS(1998); ARHS (2002)
Melissa Gilmore	ARHS 2002

Distributed at meeting 4/12/16

Natan Cohen	Fort River Elementary School (1996) , A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
M'aza Dowling-Brown	A.R.H.S. (2002)
Ian Thomas Mellor	Fort river school 1993-94
Carolyn Walker	Fort River Elementary (1996), ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002).
Leah Evangelista (Cohen)	Fort River Elementary School (1996) , A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Boyuan Gao	ARHS 2002
Liam F. Clegg	Pelham Elementary (1996), ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002)
Georgia Fowler Jenkins	wildwood elementary (1996), ARMS(1998), Amherst high school(2002)
Celeste Palladino	Fort River Elementary School 1996 A.R.M.S 1998 A.R.H.S 2002
Elizabeth Priest Swihart	ARMS 1998, ARHS 2002
Amelia Clingman	Crocker Farm Elementary School (1996), ARMS (1998) ARHS (2002)
Johari Eligan	Wildwood (1996)m A.R.M.S.(1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Rachel H. Lesser, Ph.D.	Fort River Elementary School (1996), A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Evan Donoghue	Wildwood Elementary School (1996), A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Steven A. Smith III	Fort River Elementary School (1996), A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Nicole Baldvins	Fort River (1996), ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002)
Hannah Simms	Wildwood Elementary School (1996) ARMS (98) ARHS (2002)
Castle Sinicrope	ARHS (2002)
Julia Hebert	Leverett Elementary (1996), ARHS (2002)
Christine Fattel	ARHS 2002
Sela P Bailey	Marks Meadow (1996), ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002)
Andrew Pickert	Wildwood Elementary (1996), A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Emily Hough Mileham	Pelham Elementary (1996), A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Marielle Lemer	Wildwood Elementary School (1996), A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Brooke Shippa	Crocker farm 1996, arms 1998, arhs 2002
Brendan Shea	Wildwood Elementary School (1996), ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002)
Chris Young	ARHS (2002)
Wesley J. Mendes Craig	Fort River (1996) A.R.M.S(1998) ; A.R.H.S(2002)
Rachel Roberson	Fort River Elementry 1996 ARHS 2002 ARMS 1998
Regina Ciccarella Siqueira	Wildwood(90) ARMS(97)ARHS(02)
Sofia Buford	Fort River, ARMS, ARHS, PVPA (2002)
Cynthia Talley	Wildwood, 1996, A.R.M.S. 1998, A.R.H.S 2002
Luke Bloomfield	ARHS '02
Ben Schwartz	Wildwood Elementary (1996), ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002)

Naomi Tyler	A.R.M.S (1998), A.R.H.S (2002)
Dan Goettel	ARHS (2002)
Whitney Wells	Fort River Elementary School (1996), A.R.M.S (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Naomi Gutierrez	Wildwood Elementary School (1996), ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002)
Jonah Allaben	Fort River Elementary School (1996), A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Maia Kushick Walker	Wildwood Elementary 1996, A.R.M.S. (1998) A.R.H.S. (2002)
Nick Juravich	ARHS (2002)
E. Simmons	ARMS ARHS
Amy Vernon-Jones	Fort River Elementary School (1996), A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (200)
Nathan A. Prince	A.R.H.S. (2002)
Cara Goff	Crocker Farm Elementary (1996), ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002)
Snow Family	arts 2002
DIONNE WALKER	Crocker farm 96', A.r.m.s 98', arhs 02'
Alecia Chakour	Fort River Elementary (1996)
Jeffrey Irvine	Leverett Elementary School (1996), A.R.M.S (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Julia Donna Zmed	A.R.M.S (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Ricardo burton	ARHS 2002
Amara Davis	Shutesbury Elementary (1996), A.R.M.S. (1998), A.R.H.S. (2002)
Julia Balkin	Wildwood Elementary School (attended 1991), ARHS (2002)
Michael Wick	Wildwood Elementary School (1996), ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002)
Rachel Atwood	ARHS 2002
Eric Nazar	Mark's Meadow (1993), ARHS (1999)
Lucy Munger	Wildwood Elementary School (1996, ARMS (1998), ARHS (2002)
Emily Pettit	A.R.H.S. 2002
Gino Griffin Sorcinelli	Fort River 1996, A.R.M.S. 1998, A.R.H.S. 2002
Shantia barnes(cannon)	ARHS 2002
Anika Jacque	Fort River 1996 ARMS 1998 ARHS 2002