

## **PELHAM SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Wednesday, May 4, 2016**

**6:30 P.M.**

**Community Room, Pelham Library**

### **IN ATTENDANCE**

Tara Luce, Chair

Kathryn Mazur, Human Resources Director

Trevor Baptiste

Lisa Desjarlais, Principal

Emily Marriott

Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

Darius Modestow

Dan Robb

### **1. Call to Order and Approve Minutes**

**6:33 p.m.**

Ms. Luce called the meeting to order at 6:33 p.m. She noted that approval of the minutes of April 6, 2016 will be tabled until the next meeting.

### **2. Announcements and Public Comments**

**6:34 p.m.**

Ms. Luce opened the floor to public comment, reminding the audience that policy requires that commenters refrain from speaking about personnel by name or title. Jean Sherlock, community member, cited discipline statistics from the DESE stating that they show the racial disparity in discipline in schools. Michael Mangeau, community member, spoke about the mother in the Pelham community who has been given a stay away order, which has since been amended to allow her to drop off and pick up her child from school. He encouraged the School Committee to find out why the stay away order was issued, how long it will be in place and how to get it resolved. Rebecca Casagrande, Pelham parent, asked the School Committee to think about ways to fund the old bullying curriculum that she said used to work, unlike the new state curriculum. She noted that she feels really in the middle and very disappointed in the school administration since the ACLU states that you cannot ban parents from school. Ms. Casagrande stated that there are two parents in this country who have won lawsuits against school districts that banned them from the school. Whitney Battle Baptiste, Pelham parent of three students, stated that part of the reason she has never been to a meeting is because she is married to a School Committee member; however, she does not feel she can stay silent. She spoke about the ways in which this situation has impacted her family, noting that she has lost faith in the Pelham School. Ms. Battle Baptiste stated that when people who look like her speak up for their children they are seen as threats and asked people to think twice about attacking individual members of the School Board. She noted that several children of color are feeling isolated and bullied within the building, noting that she has been dealing with this for five years and does not know what to do now except speak out publicly. Peter Blackburn, community member, read a letter written in response to "the continued mistreatment of a parent." The letter, with specific demands for action, is included in the minutes.

### **3. Principal's Update**

**6:49 p.m.**

Ms. Desjarlais reported on the Spring Fair, noting that there was a good turnout but she is not sure of the amount of funds raised. She distributed an updated Pelham Enrollment Report, noting that there have not been any major changes since the last report.

### **5. New and Continuing Business**

**6:52 p.m.**

#### **A. FY16 Third Quarter Budget Update**

Ms. Luce noted that the Amherst Town Meeting is considering the school budgets tonight, which is why Ms. Geryk and Mr. Mangano cannot be here. Ms. Mazur reported that there is a current \$12,000 deficit in the Pelham budget, which will be offset by constricted spending. Mr. Modestow asked if Mr. Mangano is concerned about being able to offset the deficit, and Ms. Mazur reported that he feels confident it can be covered.

## **B. Kindergarten Enrollment Process**

Ms. Luce noted that this topic was covered at the last meeting so additional discussion is not needed.

## **C. Elementary Regionalization/Powerpoint**

Ms. Marriott reported that she has not yet narrated the voice over portion of the Powerpoint presentation. She met with Mr. Mangano and slides have been included that address salaries and benefits, which she believes will be helpful. Ms. Marriott said it would be helpful to hear from the Committee regarding when the presentation should be ready and how it should be used. Mr. Baptiste noted that he believes it is important to understand what the purpose of the presentation will be. He said what he is most concerned about is having the rationale to prove whether this is the way to solve the problem, noting that each expense and the rate of its growth should be broken out in a chart. Mr. Robb asked when the Powerpoint is scheduled to be done and ready for public consumption. Ms. Marriott said a postcard cannot be ready in time for Town Meeting, so she wants input on whether it will be mentioned at Town Meeting and made available later. Discussion followed with Mr. Baptiste advocating for it not going out until we have information about how to fix the problem, not just a description of the problem. Mr. Robb agreed with Mr. Baptiste. Ms. Luce noted that she reviewed the presentation closely today and feels it is clear, concise and digestible. She said she thinks there is a good balance of information in it already. Mr. Modestow noted that he sees this presentation as a definition of the problem for the average citizen with discussion of long-term solutions being a future presentation. Mr. Baptiste noted that he believes more granular information about expenses is needed so the public can better understand the full problem when discussion begins around long-term solutions. Ms. Marriott noted that she sees this presentation as a way to lay the framework in order to help the town start having a basis to begin helping problem solve, and she believes Mr. Baptiste's concerns can be addressed by adding just one or two more slides. Mr. Robb, who serves as Pelham Town Moderator, said he will call on Mr. Modestow at Town Meeting so he can speak about the presentation.

## **6. School Committee Planning**

**7:12 p.m.**

The June 1 meeting will include revisiting the idea of a school equity task force at Pelham School. Mr. Modestow noted that this will be Mr. Robb's last public meeting and thanked him for his public service. Mr. Baptiste stated that Mr. Robb has been a model committee member, noting that service on the committee works best when members can work together as friends and neighbors.

## **7. Adjournment**

**7:14 p.m.**

Mr. Modestow moved to adjourn at 7:14 p.m. Mr. Baptiste seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Debbie Westmoreland

May 4, 2016

Members of the Pelham School Committee,

This letter is written in response to the continued mistreatment of a concerned Pelham Elementary School parent and her child by the school's administration. Over the past year, her daughter, a first-grade student at Pelham Elementary School, along with several other students, has been the victim of countless acts of racially-charged bullying that have been negligently handled by the school administration. Instead of dealing swiftly, effectively, and proactively with these continuous acts of bullying, the administration has pursued a course of action to publicly ostracize, vilify, and defame the mother of a bullying victim who has sought to advocate for the protection of her daughter's educational, emotional, and psychological well-being. It is both shocking and saddening that the school administration continues to demonstrate a greater willingness to go to extreme lengths to publicly portray a concerned mother as a violent threat to the safety of the school, than to actively promote a "nurturing learning environment where each child feels welcome, worthy, and valued."

In light of this situation, we call upon the Pelham Elementary School Administration and Pelham School Committee to take the following actions:

1. *An immediate dismissal of the "stay-away" order imposed upon Aisha Hiza and the issuance of a formal, public apology.* As of the writing of this letter, there has been no administrative policy, precedent, or justification provided to Aisha Hiza regarding the necessity or legal basis for this imposition. This "stay-away" order and the secrecy of its imposition represent a gross violation of Aisha Hiza's rights as a mother, citizen, and tax-payer. Furthermore, the inhospitable, rude, hostile, and embarrassing treatment of Aisha Hiza by school administration and staff has caused undue harm upon a mother attempting to protect the emotional, psychological, and educational well-being of her young daughter. For this highly objectionable and problematic treatment of a mother, the Pelham Elementary School administration owes Aisha Hiza nothing short of a formal public apology and admission of its mistreatment of Aisha, her daughter, and the numerous other victims of the administration's gross negligence.
2. *The development of a clear, concise, and effective policy on parental rights and communication procedures as they pertain to the responsibilities of the school administration to act in loco parentis of students while in school.* Over the past year, the school administration has failed to adequately act in loco parentis to protect the rights and well-being of the students in its charge. Furthermore, the school administration, faculty, and staff have repeatedly failed to inform parents of issues impacting the welfare of their children. Several instances have been reported in which children were the victims of physical and emotional bullying, yet parents were not immediately notified, or kept

Submitted at meeting 5/4/16

abreast of the ways in which the administration was acting to address these issues. The school administration has also indicated very little desire to communicate with parents regarding the handling of issues pertaining to the well-being of their children. We assert that parents have the right to immediate information regarding the welfare of their children in school, along with any administrative actions taken related to their welfare, and insist on a revised policy explicitly promoting and protecting these rights.

3. *The immediate implementation of revised administrative policies on preventing and curtailing issues of bullying in and out of school, as well as programs to support those children victimized by bullying without detriment to their educational experience.* It has become evidently clear through the experiences of numerous young students in Pelham Elementary School that the school's administration is both unwilling and incapable of protecting the welfare of students in its care. Although these issues have repeatedly been brought to the attention of teachers and administrators, negligent inaction continues unabated to the severe detriment to the well-being of young children. As the present school administration has proved itself unwilling and incapable of protecting its students, it may be time for the School Committee to consider a different course of administrative action, before students suffer more significant, irreparable harm.

We, concerned citizens of the Amherst-Pelham community, call upon the Pelham Elementary School Administration and School Committee to immediately cease its present course of negligent, hostile, and racist actions in singling-out and vilifying a mother who is being systematically denied her rights as a parent and citizen.

Furthermore, we call upon the Pelham Elementary School Administration and School Committee to pursue the aforementioned course of action with all deliberate speed to protect the educational, emotional, and social well-being of all children presently in its care, begin the process of rebuilding parental and community trust in the district, and to fulfill its professed mission statement of "providing a nurturing learning environment where each child feels welcome, worthy, and valued."

Sincerely,

Concerned members of the Amherst-Pelham community

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