

**Joint Amherst-Pelham Regional and Union 26 School Committees Meeting  
Tuesday, December 13, 2016  
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Eric Nakajima, Chair, Region  
Phoebe Hazzard, Region & Union 26  
Anastasia Ordonez, Region & Union 26 Chair  
Katherine Appy, Region & Union 26  
Vira Douangmany-Cage, Region  
Trevor Baptiste, Region & Union 26  
Audra Goscenski, Region  
Emily Marriott, Region  
Ron Mannino, Union 26

Mike Morris, Interim Superintendent  
Sean Mangano, Finance Director  
Faye Brady, Student Services Director  
Kathryn Mazur, HR Director  
Patty Bode, ARMS Principal  
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal  
John Bechtold, Performing Arts Department Head  
Public and Press  
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

**ABSENT:**

Cara Castensen, Union 26  
Stephen Sullivan, Region

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

**6:04 p.m.**

Mr. Nakajima called the Regional School Committee to order and Ms. Ordonez called the Union 26 committee to order at 6:04 p.m. Ms. Hazzard moved to approve the minutes of November 29, 2016 and Ms. Marriott seconded. Ms. Goscenski noted that her name was misspelled in the minutes. The motion to approve, with the spelling errors corrected, was approved, with Ms. Appy abstaining.

**2. ARHS Performing Arts Student Presentation**

**6:07 p.m.**

**DOCUMENT: REWIND (Powerpoint presentation)**

Dr. Morris thanked the School Committee for their interest in having students and faculty share presentations that illustrate their daily work. He introduced John Bechtold, Performing Arts Coordinator K-12, who was invited to bring students to talk about performing arts at ARHS. Mr. Bechtold noted that eight of the 10 members of the student leadership team from the latest immersive theater production came tonight to give a presentation regarding the work. The students in attendance were Ian Kaye, Tessa Levenstein, Delia McHale, Sam Boyle, Kahil Henderson, Nate Weinberg, Sierra Hausthor and Sara Levy. Mr. Kaye provided the details about what information the audience knows as the immersive theater experience begins. Ms. Levenstein explained that audience members are able to “unlock” rooms and scenes with QR codes that relate to the background information the audience has been given. Ms. Levy noted that spaces throughout the school lent to the production and explained how the spaces and set pieces were coordinated. Ms. Hausthor spoke regarding the work of the tech students. Mr. Boyle talked about the role of each of the student leaders. Mr. Henderson explained the technology that was used in each production. Mr. Weinberg explained that immersive theater is more like a film process than a theater process since there can be multiple takes, and he explained what the QR codes are and how they were used to provide sound files or images to lead the audience. Students provided headphones for the School Committee members that allowed them to experience two minutes of the production. Members of the committee thanked the students for their impressive presentation and Mr. Bechtold for his incredible work that brings out the talent in the students.

**3. Announcements and Public Comment**

**6:24 p.m.**

Katie Lazdowski and Alisa Melnick, members of the SETF, presented a memo advocating that the School Committee set aside funds to hire a part-time specialist in participatory action research (PAR) to fully implement the school climate policy that was adopted last year. Rick Hood, former School Committee member, urged the school committee to consider the request presented by Ms. Lazdowski and Ms. Melnick and to consider doing the student and teacher climate survey that was used in 2014 annually. He also voiced his support for Dr. Morris since his contract is on the agenda tonight and thanked him for stepping into the position.

**3. Interim Superintendent's Update**

**6:28 p.m.**

**DOCUMENT: Interim Superintendent's Update to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee December 13, 2016**

Dr. Morris reported briefly on a number of topics including:

- Equity work being done in the district in partnership with Pat Romney and Robert Principe;
- His presentation about our districts to Doctoral students at Boston College on December 8;

- The positive response to the notification that there will be no homework or requirements to complete projects over winter break;
- The arrival of the electric school bus that was purchased through grant funds;
- An update on the district's response to Anti-Semitic incidents at ARMS and the positive student reaction;
- An update on the ARHS gym floor repairs, which will not be completed this school year; and
- The ARMS chorus' participation in the Lighting of the Merry Maple event last week.

Ms. Hazzard noted that she would like to have a conversation regarding the intentionality of homework in the district. Mr. Nakajima agreed that it would be beneficial to do so. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked if Ms. Bode might be able to make some remarks about the anti-Semitic incidents at the middle school. She suggested that it would be helpful for parents to receive notice about such issues more quickly so they will be prepared when students come home with questions or concerns. Ms. Bode spoke about the response to the incidents, noting that she received information about the concerns over the weekend, which prompted immediate action with the students on Monday. The parent letter was then crafted to go out on Tuesday. She explained that some things happen and must be dealt with in the moment, which can slow down communication; however, she thanked Ms. Douangmany Cage for the feedback and noted that she will keep it in mind.

#### **4. New and Continuing Business**

**7:06 p.m.**

##### **A. Interim Superintendent's Contract**

###### **DOCUMENTS: Draft Contract for Dr. Michael Morris**

Mr. Nakajima noted that this is an agenda item for both the Regional and Union 26 committees. He and Chair Ordonez have been working on the contract for Dr. Morris, which runs through this school year. Mr. Nakajima stated that it is a fairly standard contract with some items of note. One such item is that the Amherst, Pelham and Regional School Committees will all be directly engaged in developing goals and completing the superintendent evaluation, which is a change from prior evaluation processes. Mr. Baptiste and Ms. Ordonez noted that the version of the contract presented does not reflect that change. After discussion, it was agreed that only a small change is needed in one section to reflect the change in the evaluation process. Ms. Goscenski moved to amend the contract language in Section 12, Subparagraph A to read "the individual Committees in the form of summative evaluations...." Mr. Baptiste seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. On behalf of Union 26, Mr. Baptiste moved to approve the contract for Interim Superintendent Michael Morris, as amended, for a term of October 25, 2016 through June 30, 2017 with a gross annual salary of \$145,000.00, prorated for the period of the contract. Ms. Hazzard seconded and the motion was approved unanimously. Mr. Baptiste made the same motion on behalf of the Regional School Committee. Ms. Douangmany Cage seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Nakajima noted that a late item has been added to the joint agenda at Mr. Mangano's request—the RFP for the superintendent search. Mr. Mangano reported that two proposals were received, one from NESDEC and the other from Ray and Associates. One was strong and the other was less so; however, the stronger proposal listed their price which cannot be done in the technical bid. Mr. Mangano explained that there are three options for moving forward: 1) award the contract to the less strong firm; 2) go the route of asking for quotes, which requires the district to take the lowest price submitted; or 3) redo the RFP process, which will take an additional two to three weeks. After discussion, Mr. Baptiste moved to reissue the RFP. Ms. Hazzard seconded and additional discussion followed, particularly regarding concern about how the search timeline will be detrimentally impacted by the delay of reissuing an RFP. After debate, the Regional School Committee unanimously approved Mr. Baptiste's motion. On behalf of the Union 26 committee, Ms. Appy then moved to reissue the RFP. Mr. Mannino seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Mannino moved to adjourn Union 26 at 7:22 p.m. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

##### **B. Policy Review**

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

###### **DOCUMENTS: JKAA: Physical Restraint and Behavior Support**

Ms. Hazzard moved to approve Policy JKAA—Physical Restraint and Behavior Support as presented. Ms. Goscenski seconded and discussion followed. Ms. Ordonez expressed concern about passing a policy such as this without input from SEPAC. Dr. Morris noted that this policy was state-mandated to address issues of restraint being overused statewide. Dr. Brady explained that the policy was originally brought forward last year for the reasons Dr. Morris noted. She explained that it is being brought back at this time simply to add-on the state definitions of terms, as required by DESE. The policy itself has not changed at all since it was adopted last year. Ms. Ordonez thanked Dr. Morris and Dr. Brady, noting that she

would find it helpful when policies such as this are brought forward to hear more details and to hear from those who would be impacted by it. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that there is such a close relationship between Dr. Brady and SEPAC, and this policy protects students, so she feels comfortable voting tonight. Mr. Nakajima called for a vote and the motion was unanimously approved.

**Policy: Teaching about Alcohol, Tobacco and Drugs and Policy: Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Use by Students Prohibited**  
**DOCUMENTS: *Teaching about Alcohol, Tobacco and Drugs; Alcohol, Tobacco and Drug Use by Students Prohibited***

Dr. Morris explained that the new Opioid bill passed last year requires that school districts develop policies regarding teaching about and use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. The policies were due at the end of October, but DESE granted an extension for the district to submit them. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked if these policies would ever be expanded to include drug testing of students. Dr. Morris assured her there are no plans for such testing. Ms. Ordonez suggested adding language that specifically addresses prescription drugs since that is the fastest growing issue, particularly in Western Massachusetts. Mr. Nakajima noted that it will be important to understand how school districts will confront the change in the state law regarding the use of marijuana, which takes effect this week. Dr. Morris noted that, while it will take time for it to change culturally, educationally the conversation is about how to teach about marijuana use in the same way we teach about alcohol use. Mr. Baptiste supported the change in language from “drugs” to “controlled substances.”

**C. FY18 Fees Update—Transcripts**

**DOCUMENT: *FY2017 Fee Review and Proposed Changes for FY2018***

Mr. Mangano explained that the Guidance Office wants to make the first three transcripts free for students since they are now done mostly electronically, which has decreased the amount of time required to process them. Ms. Ordonez moved to approve the Regional Schools fee schedule as presented for FY2018. Mr. Baptiste seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**D. Budget Guidance Discussion**

Mr. Mangano asked the School Committee to consider whether they would be amenable to moving to an electronic version of the budget this year instead of a binder. Mr. Baptiste noted that he would like to have a final copy of the budget in a binder. Ms. Goscenski and Ms. Douangmany Cage both expressed their preference for electronic versions. Mr. Nakajima suggested that he would support allowing individual members to request paper versions of the budget if that is their preference. Mr. Nakajima invited each member of the committee to share their thoughts about what should guide budget planning. Mr. Baptiste noted that the School Committee’s commitment to equity would be reflected by having finances for a person dedicated to those issues. Ms. Ordonez noted that it would be good to consider allocating funds to collecting climate study data and a PAR employee. Ms. Appy noted that the comprehensive programming and electives are an area she will always advocate for maintaining as broadly as possible. Mr. Nakajima agreed with Ms. Appy, noting that providing consistency of support for these offerings is important for staff morale and student planning. He noted that he is also interested in engaging community stakeholders systematically and consistently every couple of years, with alternate years for implementation of ideas for improving climate. Ms. Hazzard noted that she also encourages maintaining opportunities for experiences like that presented by the students tonight. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that we need to think creatively about ways to bring more resources into the district. She expressed support for the STEM work in the schools; for looking at the restorative practice culture, with potential to develop a consistent program; for the climate study and PAR; and for finding ways to make free/reduced lunch, fees and other costs more equitable. Ms. Goscenski also noted that she supports the comprehensive program of the district, expressing appreciation for what professional development for our staff means for our students. Ms. Marriott asked what the timeline is for food service management. Mr. Mangano noted that this spring would be the time to make the decision if there were to be a change, for implementation in FY19. Dr. Morris noted that the feedback from the committee is incredibly helpful.

**E. Legal Counsel Discussion**

Mr. Nakajima noted that it makes sense to do a market scan for legal counsel. He noted that it makes sense that the district could have different counsel for special education matters versus general counsel, including contract negotiations. Dr. Morris asked what the committee considers a reasonable timeline for them and discussion followed. Ms. Goscenski noted that the logical step would be to have new counsel in place for the next time counsel is needed, such as for negotiations, or to go through negotiations with the counsel who is in place. Mr. Baptiste said counsel is needed to codify whatever is decided through negotiations, but not during negotiations. Ms. Appy noted that, in the past, the attorney has been present for all of negotiations. Ms. Ordonez clarified that current negotiations with the largest employee group are being done in a different way which is more of a conversation than in the past. She noted that she does not believe looking for new

counsel would impede negotiations at this time. Dr. Morris noted that he would not plan this around predictable things such as negotiations, but around committee capacity to take the search on with other matters currently underway. Ms. Marriott asked for clarification of whether the School Committee is looking for counsel that is separate from the counsel for the Superintendent. Mr. Nakajima noted that he believes it would be expensive and potentially detrimental to the work of the district to have separate counsel in anticipation of the rare instances in which the Superintendent and School Committee require it. Dr. Morris stated that having separate counsel for special education and general counsel would mitigate any potential issues. Mr. Baptiste agreed, noting that this is a time to have a conversation regarding what qualities are needed in an attorney. Discussion turned to how to proceed with a search. Mr. Mangano noted that typically a RFP model is what he has seen districts use, with interviews of interested firms. Ms. Westmoreland reviewed the process that was followed by the School Committee the last time a law firm was selected. After further discussion, it was agreed that Mr. Mangano will provide the School Committee with a schedule of when he believes this process could be done, and a subcommittee of the School Committee will be established to move forward.

**5. School Committee Planning**

**8:53 p.m.**

Food Service—feedback, alternatives and process for alternatives (one January meeting for food services, one for budget); Ms. Marriott suggested that the policy subcommittee post a list of upcoming policies that will be considered; MASC workshops are being scheduled; January 10 meeting agenda items will include food services, legal services process, superintendent’s goals, policies for second reading/vote

**6. Adjourn**

**9:01 p.m.**

Ms. Goscenski moved to adjourn at 9:01 p.m. Mr. Douangmany Cage seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Debbie Westmoreland