

REGULAR MEETING OF THE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Tuesday, June 2, 2015

Library, Amherst Regional High School

IN ATTENDANCE:

Trevor Baptiste, Chair
Kathleen Traphagen, Vice-Chair
Stephen Sullivan
Katherine Appy
Vira Douangmany Cage
Phoebe Hazzard
Kip Fonsh
Rick Hood
Stephen Sullivan
Dan Robb
Josiah Vasquez, Student Representative

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder
Public and Press

A. Welcome

6:03 PM

A. Call to Order and Agenda Review

Mr. Baptiste called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. and reviewed the agenda. It was agreed that the policy discussion will be moved to the beginning of the agenda.

B. Approve Minutes

The minutes of May 20, 2015 were approved with Mr. Hood and Mr. Robb abstaining.

2. Announcements and Public Comments

6:08 PM

Ms. Appy distributed a draft letter for the School Committee to consider in support of the Massachusetts Teachers Association's Week of Action on High Stakes Testing. As part of the week, educators are encouraged to contact their legislators in support of House Bill 340, an Act Relative to a Moratorium on High Stakes Testing and PARCC. Ms. Appy noted that she will be asking the Amherst School Committee to approve the letter and requested that it be considered by the Regional School Committee as well. Mr. Baptiste noted that this falls within the Committee's advocacy priority so it will be added to the June 9 agenda. Ms. Geryk reported that she and Mr. Morris will be submitting a similar letter on behalf of the district administration.

3. New and Continuing Business

6:12 PM

A. Policy for First Reading

DOCUMENT: School Climate Data Collection and Analysis

Mr. Robb reported that the policy subcommittee has worked closely with the CCC Subcommittee to develop the draft policy presented tonight. He read the draft policy aloud, noting that the one component that the Policy Subcommittee believes needs discussion is the requirement for IRB approved research, based on the concerns expressed by the Superintendent in the distributed memo. Ms. Appy noted that she fully supports a policy requiring this type of data collection; however, she does not believe the IRB requirement is appropriate because students are not research subjects. Additionally, the Superintendent has determined through the UMass IRB that this type of research does not meet their standard. Ms. Appy noted that she would like to see this policy move forward since it would make a strong statement that the School Committee supports this type of data collection. Members of the CCC introduced themselves prior to their presentation about the policy. Katie Lazdowski, Alisa Melnick, Nicola Usher, Kathleen Anderson and Carlene Basler utilized a Powerpoint presentation and a YouTube video to review components of the policy draft, including a video showing a sample of participatory action research (PAR) being conducted by students. Discussion followed. Mr. Baptiste expressed his support for the policy, noting that he also believes that this data collection does not rise to IRB research. Ms. Traphagen thanked the CCC for their work on this policy, noting that she is excited about the work that will come from it. She suggested sending the policy back to the policy subcommittee with the new language suggested by the Superintendent to then be brought back to the full committee for a second reading. Mr. Robb asked if there is other wording that could replace the IRB. Ms. Lazdowski noted that as a doctoral student she has spoken with professors on the UMass IRB and she believes that IRB review is important in this work due to the sensitive nature of the questions that will be asked. Mr. Fonsh noted that the policy does not include a timeline and asked what the intention is for the timeline and frequency. Ms. Geryk said that she thinks the policy is very strong and will engage more student voices. She said that her only feedback is that data in school is gathered from students to inform our programs, not as research subjects, which is why she reached out to the UMass IRB. Mr. Hood made some specific language suggestions that he will share in writing with Mr. Robb.

2. Regionalization Discussion Continued—Governance Structure

Members of the committee shared their thoughts regarding the governance structure proposed by the RAWG for an expanded Region. Mr. Hood explained that he supports a smaller board than proposed, noting that he would like a board of 4-1-1-1, with Amherst having four members and each of the other towns having one. Each member of the full Region would have 1 vote and members of the half region would have a half vote. He also spoke about the possibility of an expanded role for School Councils. Ms. Traphagen agreed, noting that she does not believe a 13 member committee would be functional. Mr. Fonsh reminded the School Committee that the proposal made by the RAWG resulted from three years of study and compromise, noting that changing one thing will impact other things in the proposal. Mr. Sullivan noted that the Shutesbury School Committee and members of the town were kept in the dark about regionalization during the three year process. While he appreciates that members of the RAWG lived it for three years, others are just coming to it and need time to process it. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that it is important to engage in community dialogue to hear the community members' real concerns, including fear of closing a school. She said that while hard decisions must be made, it is imperative to hear from the broader community to inform those decisions. Ms. Hazzard noted that, as an Amherst member, she appreciates the integrity of the smaller towns and the way they value their schools. She said that there is concern about whether seven Amherst residents will step up to serve on a 13 member board, but it would also provide an opportunity to hear from a broader range of voices. Mr. Fonsh spoke about the way in which Leverett currently elects School Committee members and the significant change the proposed governance structure will represent for the town. Alisa Brewer, Amherst RAWG member, spoke about the reasons for many of the governance recommendations in the RAWG proposal. Extensive discussion followed regarding possible ways to move forward with a decision about what governance structure to support and how to gather public feedback. Andy Steinberg, RAWG Chair, thanked the Regional School Committee for their discussion. He noted that they considered the issues in the right order by discussing financial and educational benefits before discussing governance. Mr. Steinberg pointed out that it is important to have a governance structure that will assuage fears and work in the beginning, knowing that it can be changed if it proves to be unwieldy. Discussion followed regarding ways to engage the broader communities to hear feedback. Ms. Douangmany Cage spoke in favor of utilizing PAR for this purpose. Ms. Traphagen expressed concern that no system will ever please everyone and using a process such as PAR will slow the process down with little results. After further discussion, Mr. Baptiste said that he will entertain motions regarding any components of the RAWG document at the June 23 meeting, which will include a wrap-up discussion regarding regionalization.

5. Accept Gifts

DOCUMENT: Memo to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee from Mary Wallace, Treasurer, dated May 28, 2015

Ms. Hazzard moved to accept \$1,500 from the Trustees of Amherst College for film production; \$1,667 from The *Daily Hampshire Gazette* for the *Daily Hampshire Gazette* Scholarship; \$500 from the Northampton Elks and \$500 from HPBC, Inc. for the 2015 general scholarship; \$25 from Florence Savings Bank for the high school principal's discretionary use; \$500 from Norman and Eva Brown for the Metzger Brown Holocaust Remembrance Scholarship; and an in-kind donation of flowers from Big Y for graduation. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

4. School Committee Planning

8:24 PM

Agenda items for June 9 include an update on the ARMS and ARHS schedules, an update on co-teaching, SEPAC action plan, later start time, warrant signing committee, advocacy letter, and a 7-12 revisioning update.

5. Adjournment

8:30 PM

Mr. Sullivan moved to adjourn at 8:31 p.m. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland