

Regular Meeting of the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee

Wednesday, May 20, 2015

6:00 p.m.

Cafeteria, Amherst Regional High School

In Attendance:

Trevor Baptiste, Chair

Kip Fonsh

Stephen Sullivan

Katherine Appy

Kathleen Traphagen

Vira Douangmany Cage

Phoebe Hazzard

Maria Geryk, Superintendent

Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent

Sean Mangano, Finance Director

Jerry Champagne, Information Systems Director

Elaine Puleo, Shutesbury RAWG Member

Jeff Eiseman, Pelham RAWG Member

Public

Absent:

Rick Hood

Dan Robb

1. Welcome and Call to Order

A. Mr. Baptiste called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m. and reviewed the agenda.

B. The minutes of May 12, 2015 were unanimously approved with Mr. Fonsh abstaining as he was not present at the meeting.

2. Announcements and Public Comments

Ms. Hazzard mentioned that she appreciated reading about the clerical award winners in the Superintendent's weekly update. Ms. Geryk shared graduation dates and staff celebration dates and that they will be included in this week's update.

3. Regionalization Discussion—Educational Benefits

RAWG members who served on the Education Subcommittee of RAWG shared their impressions of potential educational benefits of an expanded region. Jeff Eiseman, Pelham RAWG member, shared six points:

- Financial Stability and Excellence—The hill towns are not financially stable and cannot continue at the same level of quality into the future.
- Complacency—Our schools do not do as well on MCAS as some others, and while folks are generally happy, we want to continue to improve.
- Outcomes—Outcomes related to academic, social relationships and self-management could be improved with regionalization.
- Time on Task—It is desirable to have a high percentage of time spent in powerful learning activities, which are based in previous learning. This is difficult when students get to middle school with different learning experiences.
- K-12 Alignment—Alignment is needed in courses, assessments, and professional development.
- Evaluation Systems and Other Major State Initiatives—Less time spent on reports and non-instructional tasks leads to efficiencies, with results in positive student outcomes.

Elaine Puleo, Shutesbury RAWG member, shared the following:

- Shared resources could help the small towns because of the economy of scale.
- It is hard for the small towns to have true teacher collaboration with others doing same job since there are only one to two teachers for each grade level.
- Not every school works for every student, and it might be beneficial to have some in-region choice options for families.
- Mentoring is difficult in small schools because there may not be another person with the same job in the school. Expanding the region could help with retention.

Katherine Appy, Amherst, RAWG member, outlined the following potential educational benefits:

- The small town's financial struggles can impact the budget of the current secondary Region, impacting student outcomes.

- Operational efficiencies in a region lead to educational benefits.
- Having three separate districts is a barrier when seeking to hire a superintendent.
- Expanding the Region would lead to more robust Special Education services, specials, math coaches, etc.
- Middle School teachers describe the struggle to get all 7th graders on same page, noting that it takes months, which results in lost instructional time.
- Some research shows better student achievement results when districts are regionalized.

Kip Fonsh, Leverett, RAWG member, noted that regionalization is important for the future of the towns because it will put them in the best position to respond to challenges in the future.

Discussion followed after the comments by RAWG members. Ms. Hazzard noted that she heard many reasons for regionalization, but wondered what ideas there are against regionalization. She also asked if it is feasible to think that teachers or students would be able to change schools within the district. Ms. Geryk noted that open enrollment is a school committee decision via policy, so it would be possible for children to change schools. Ms. Puleo noted that schools are the center of small towns, so some community members see Regionalization as a disadvantage because they would lose local control of the schools. Mr. Baptiste noted that concerns raised in Pelham were about after-school programs, teacher seniority and security, and whether they would stay in their same current school if we regionalize. Ms. Geryk noted that she has also heard concerns about autonomy of the small town schools, but pointed out that we already work well with Pelham. She said regionalization would enhance professional development, teacher induction and special education opportunities. Ms. Geryk noted that the current system is inefficient with too much emphasis on the operational side of the job due to having three separate districts. Mr. Morris noted that recent research suggests that new teachers with a strong mentoring/induction program are more likely to be successful and more likely to stay in their current jobs than those without it. The School Committee then discussed the process going forward, and agreed that the meeting on June 2 will focus on governance. The June 23 meeting will be spent reviewing things in the aggregate and deciding if, and what, to send to the attorney so that a revised Regional Agreement draft can be written. There was some discussion that RAWG was full of divergent views, which is why it took years to come to consensus. Janet McGowen, community member and parent, shared a concern about the process, stating that there should be more community engagement.

4. Move to Adjourn

7:20 p.m.

The committee voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:20 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent