

**REGULAR Meeting of the Amherst School Committee
November 17, 2015
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

IN ATTENDANCE:

Katherine Appy, Chair
Vira Douangmany-Cage
Phoebe Hazzard
Rick Hood
Kathleen Traphagen (arr. 6:03 p.m.)

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Nick Yaffe, Principal Wildwood School
Bobbie Finocchio, Principal Fort River School
Derek Shea, Principal Crocker Farm School
Jim LaPosta, JCJ Principal Designer
Tom Murphy, JLA Project Manager
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Marta Guevara, Family Engagement Director
Monica Hall, Equity/Prof Development Director
Carol Ross, Media/Climate Specialist
Community members & Press
Kimberly Stender, Recorder

1. Welcome

6:02 p.m.

Ms. Appy called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. and reviewed the agenda. Ms. Hazzard moved to approve the minutes of November 9, 2015. Mr. Hood seconded the motion. Ms. Traphagen asked that a sentence be amended. She will send Mr. Morris the corrected sentence for inclusion and the November 9, 2015 minutes will reflect this change. The motion passed with one abstention (Douangmany-Cage).

2. Announcements & Public Comment

6:04 p.m.

Vince O'Connor (community member) addressed issues faced by ELL programs in a very large elementary school and asked the school committee and administration to demonstrate caution as the school building process moves forward. He does not want the same design and program mistakes made in the 1990s when the high school was renovated happen again. He urged the judicious release of accurate information to the community. Ms. Appy wordsmithed the House Bill 326 letter and will bring it to the December 22, 2015 meeting. Ms. Traphagen asked members if they had heard about DESE's decision regarding standardized testing. Mr. Morris explained the decision in depth and how it could impact ARPS students.

3. Superintendent's Update

6:15 p.m.

Ms. Geryk reported that the Amherst Together November 16, 2015 event featuring the film, *James Baldwin: The Price of Ticket*, was well-attended. She thanked Carol Ross and community partners for their efforts.

4. New & Continuing Business

6:16 p.m.

A. Wildwood Building Project Update

DOCUMENT: Meeting & Milestone Schedule: Feasibility Study and Schematic Design

Mr. Murphy explained the document and emphasized significant dates. He noted that some dates may change. Ms. Traphagen inquired about the date for the school committee's advisory vote and grade configuration vote. Mr. Hood explained that more information would be forthcoming at the December 22, 2015 meeting and the advisory vote could occur at the January 19, 2016 meeting. Mr. Murphy added that basic financials will be provided at the December 22, 2015 meeting. Ms. Hazzard asked if a design recommendation would be presented at the December 8, 2015 public forum. Mr. Murphy replied he did not anticipate a final decision regarding one design over another. Mr. Morris added that complexities of the design and site issues may impact the calendar and schedule. Mr. Murphy went on to say that the final cost will be determined by different factors (site preparation, materials, etc) and costs will be presented as the process advances. Mr. LaPosta explained the term eco-charette. This term is used in conjunction with

green schools and the LEAD rating system and is a requirement in the building process. It is a workshop or session for community members, committee members and administrators to brainstorm ideas to create the most sustainable school. Ms. Douangmany-Cage asked if there is an updated listing of the MSBA Building Committee on the district website. She also asked if the latest building committee meeting minutes would be posted as the last ones posted were dated April 8, 2015. Mr. Morris explained that the building committee would approve the minutes at their next meeting and that these would be posted on the Joslin, Lesser & Associates website. The JLA website is currently linked to the district website. Mr. Morris spoke about his November 13, 2015 phone conversation with the MSBA. During the conversation, topics such as acceptable class size, overcrowding, and design options were discussed. He explained that the MSBA has a different idea of what enrollment and overcrowding mean compared to the perception of ARPS administrators. He explained that this is because the MSBA reviews requests from districts which are far worse than Amherst. He expects a response from the MSBA by November 30, 2015 and will share this with the school committee. Ms. Geryk added that the conversation was meaningful and contained many clarifying questions and data. She stated that twin Grade K-6 schools may be an option and that she remains cautiously optimistic that the MSBA will consider this option. Mr. Murphy stated that the MSBA will fund the project at 68% and perhaps this percentage will increase as LEAD and other incentives are explored. Mr. Morris reported that the trip he, Mr. Yaffe and Mr. LaPosta took to the 1,000 student Acton/Boxborough school (Merriam and McCarthy-Towne) on November 16, 2015 was extremely informative. Mr. Yaffe spoke about the physical design of the building, common spaces, the overall climate of the two schools and the collaborative nature of staff. He very much admired the concept of a “Co-Existing Committee” and was hopeful a similar group could be established in the new Amherst school(s). Mr. Morris was satisfied with the informative feedback the group received from the Acton/Boxborough staff and administrators. Mr. Yaffe was impressed with how each school created their own identity and climate and that students and staff seemed calm and happy despite being in a large building. He commented on the design and layout of the building made it seem compact and easily accessible (ex. short hallways). Ms. Appy asked how in such a large school was class size equalized. Mr. Morris explained that families are offered school choice amongst the town’s elementary schools and administrators determine classes at schools based upon requests. This is a different model than what is used in Amherst. Ms. Douangmany-Cage asked if students wore uniforms and how common spaces were shared between the schools especially at lunch. Mr. Yaffe replied that students did not wear uniforms; lunch and recess seemed orderly; and classes had their own spaces on the playground and in the cafetorium. He was very impressed with the library design and how two classes could use it simultaneously without much noise. He admitted it was much quieter than the Wildwood library when one class utilizes it. Mr. LaPosta explained the MSBA Space Template and stressed it was an important document which will be examined by the MSBA as changes to the design are made. He indicated that many versions of this worksheet will be completed throughout the entire building process. He then presented the site alternatives and pointed out water tables, culverts, topography, flood plains, underground streams as well as regulatory issues for each site. He explained that a multilevel school has a smaller footprint and this concept may best be suited for the proposed sites. The sites he showcased were the current Wildwood and Fort River campuses and the Hawthorne Farm property (adjacent to Wildwood and ARMS near East Pleasant Street).

B. Fees Review

7:14 p.m.

DOCUMENT: FY2016 Fee Review & Proposed Changes for FY2017

Mr. Mangano announced that there would not be a vote this evening and explained the budget document. He explained fee increases for school meals and Crocker Farm Pre-School. Ms. Douangmany-Cage inquired how tuition is adjusted for pre-school parents who use State vouchers. Mr. Mangano agreed to research this and will provide information regarding this. Ms. Douangmany-Cage asked about the contract with Whitson’s Foods. Mr. Mangano explained that the contract is currently in its third and last year with two options years (2016-2017 and 2017-2018). He went on to say that it is a long process to select a new vendor and requires a committee of community members, school committee members and school staff to craft an RFP and determine the best vendor based on specific criteria.

C. District Improvement Plan

7:18 p.m.

DOCUMENT: ARPS District Improvement Plan: A Blueprint for Continuous Growth 2015-2016

Ms. Geryk presented the overview of the District Improvement Plan's goals, priorities and practices. She addressed co-teaching, Professional Learning Network and DESE equity work, student and family engagement work with the University of Massachusetts and ARPS Family Center, and the work with the University of Chicago School of Education Reform's 5Essentials survey work.

D. School Improvement Plans

7:32 p.m.

DOCUMENTS: Crocker Farm Elementary School Improvement Plan 2015-2016; Wildwood School Improvement Plan 2015-2016; Fort River School Improvement Plan 2015-2016

Mr. Shea praised the talented and committed Crocker Farm staff which develops, supports and fosters learning skills in all students. He showcased several books staff and administrators have read which enhance teaching and learning perspectives. He noted that there is a strong connection amongst all the elementary schools with a focus on best ideas and practices. He spoke about the results of the family survey conducted in Spring 2015 which indicate that Crocker Farm is heading in the right direction. He praised the Teacher Leadership Team, PGO and School Climate Team. Mr. Yaffe stated that the District Improvement Plan is finely crafted, ambitious and serves as an excellent guide for all elementary schools. He praised each elementary school for adhering to this road map while simultaneously remaining unique in terms of climate and culture. Mr. Yaffe stressed the importance of student voice, PBIS, using mistakes as learning tools and the integrated arts program. He believes it is critical to emotionally support staff each day. Ms. Finocchio highlighted effective instruction, aligned curriculum, and student social/emotional/health needs and increasing family engagement in the Fort River SIP. She also mentioned arts integration, co-teaching, ARPS Family Center and before/after school programs. Ms. Douangmany-Cage commented on the Wildwood SIP cover photograph and the welcome sign at Crocker Farm. She asked if the Crocker Farm lunch room was quieter. Mr. Shea replied that it was because staff took the time to develop a simple plan to engage students in a knowledge game throughout the meal. Ms. Traphagen thanked all principals for their work and wanted to hear about accelerated programs for elementary students. She stated this has been brought to her attention many times by parents/guardians. Ms. Geryk stated that project-based differentiated learning will enhance the educational experience of all students and spark collaborative creativity. She went on to say that high achieving students in the district far outscore students from other districts on the MCAS test. Mr. Yaffe explained that there is a high cognitive demand on students especially in the Everyday Math program and math labs. He added that the Everyday Math program is the anchor to establish standards and integrated arts enhancements and creates multiple entry points for learning. He stated that the Reader Writing Workshop has experienced success. Ms. Finocchio indicated that Fort River is making gains as math coaches and reading specialists are stretching the minds of all students. She mentioned that the current buzz word at the school is "grapple" as staff determines new ways to bring out the best in each student. She added that SuperKids and Reader Writing Workshop are enhancing ELA differentiation. Mr. Shea suggested that the math coaches and reading specialists present their work to the school committee at an upcoming meeting. Ms. Traphagen asked how the district best meets the needs of students who are not always "in the lane." She suggested a committee be formed to examine ways to support gifted students. She added that this has equity implications as not every family knows that their child has options (skipping grades, accelerated learning, etc.). Mr. Yaffe suggested that gifted students may find challenges in project-based learning. Ms. Traphagen was appreciative that quantitative goals and an emphasis on equity was included in the Fort River SIP. She suggested more data regarding the effectiveness of PBIS and discipline data should be included. Ms. Finocchio explained that the Fort River Climate Committee examines PBIS and discipline data and also develops plans and formulates topics for staff meetings. Mr. Shea added that the ongoing PBIS work with Dr. Sara Whitcomb (University of Massachusetts College of Education) and Dr. Brady has produced effective solutions to issues. He provided an example of a playground situation which staff solved through collaborative means in real time. Ms. Traphagen would like field trips to be discussed at an upcoming meeting. She suggests the committee also examine time on learning primarily with science and social studies as this seems to be lacking. She believes that not enough emphasis is currently placed on these subjects. Ms. Finocchio explained that staff can integrate science and social studies with math. In this way teachers would not be taking away but enhancing what currently exists. Mr. Morris explained

that this is currently being done on the secondary level and welcomes suggestions as to how this could be done on the elementary level. Mr. Hood thanked all principals for their work and appreciates the honest conversation. He stated that in the six years he has served on school committee he has noticed an increased collaborative nature amongst elementary school leadership, programs and initiatives. Ms. Geryk commented that the elementary leadership team is comprised of dynamic, talented and dedicated educators who do amazing work each day. Mr. Morris stated he enjoys working with exceptional principals in Amherst and Pelham. Mr. Yaffe commented that the work is based on the DIP and is being expanded in the schools. Mr. Shea added that teacher leadership capacity is off the charts. Ms. Hazzard also thanked the principals for their work and noted that research-based tools can enhance student work to achieve goals. She requested that AIMS Web scores from each school be provided to school committee members and Ms. Geryk said they would be. Ms. Hazzard inquired about the Diverse America curriculum. Ms. Hall explained that this could be integrated across the curriculum on all grade levels and through project-based learning. Ms. Hazzard also praised the Elementary Garden Program and the enhanced music program. Ms. Appy thanked the principals for their continued work and commitment to all students, staff and families. She stated that the SIPs have become guiding documents in which PBIS, collaboration, arts integration and programs are highlighted and serve as foundations to move all students forward. She would like to see special education and MCAS scores be featured more prominently in the SIPs. She added that professional development and teaching collaboration time is commendable with limited resources. Ms. Geryk reminded the group that the district is creating a learning community in which all learners can achieve. Mr. Shea added that the new ARPS Family Center Home Visit Program is very effective. With permission from the superintendent, Mr. Shea invited school committee members to visit Crocker Farm School.

E. FY17 Budget Guidance

8:42 p.m.

Mr. Mangano and Ms. Geryk asked the school committee to send queries regarding the budget to them. Mr. Hood reminded members that reductions and additions are the most important items in this process and that guidelines are very general. Mr. Mangano stated that the budget will be discussed at the Four Towns meeting on Saturday, December 5, 2015 (9:00 a.m., ARMS Library) and all are encouraged to attend. He will present a detailed budget at the January 19, 2015 school committee meeting. Mr. Hood suggested that an additions/reductions Plan B be created if public feedback is negative at the February 9, 2016 meeting.

F. Accept Gifts

8:49 p.m.

There were no gifts to accept.

5. School Committee Planning

8:49 p.m.

After a brief discussion, the committee decided to include the following topics on the December 22, 2015 agenda: field trips, current restraint policy, wellness policy (lunch/recess detention) and preliminary budget guidelines. It was also decided that a potential vote regarding the FY17 Budget would occur at the January 19, 2016 meeting.

6. Adjournment

8:56 p.m.

Ms. Traphagen moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:56 p.m. and Mr. Hood seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kimberly Stender

