

**Regular Meeting of the Amherst School Committee
Tuesday, February 9, 2016
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

IN ATTENDANCE

Katherine Appy, Chair
Vira Douangmany-Cage
Phoebe Hazzard
Rick Hood

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Kathy Mazur, Human Resources Director
Nick Yaffe, Wildwood Elementary School Principal
Derek Shea, Crocker Farm Elementary School Principal
Jean Fay, APEA President
Community & Press
Kimberly Stender, Recorder

ABSENT

Kathleen Traphagen

1. Call to Order 6:02 p.m.

Ms. Appy called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. The agenda was reviewed and Ms. Appy suggested that a public comment section be added after the budget presentation.

2. Announcements & Public Comment 6:05 p.m.

There were no announcements. Laura Dalton (Fort River parent) asked the committee to reconsider the budget cut regarding the library paraeducators and stressed the importance of literacy and life skills for all students. Flavia Curea (Fort River parent) explained that library specials are the highlight of many students' day. Sylvia Kurchecian (Crocker Farm parent) stated that the library paras are an underestimated asset and a critical component of early childhood education. She read a list detailing the duties of paras. Laura Quilter (Wildwood parent) stated that class library prep time is critical especially in Grades 5 and 6 when children are exploring their gender and sexuality much like she did as a child. Chelsea Holford (Crocker Farm parent) stated it is devastating to eliminate the Grade 5 and 6 library specials as well as limit student access from the library. Susan Wells (Wildwood Librarian) spoke to small, local budget cuts which would cripple the library program. She provided an account of a typical day in the library. Alice Goodwin-Brown (Crocker Farm teacher) explained the importance of library programs especially events like Lemur Day and Book Awards and asked the committee to reconsider these cuts. A Wildwood parent and library volunteer spoke with her son regarding the excellent work of the librarian and paraeducator. Lissa Pierce Bonifaz (Wildwood parent) implored that the budget cuts be refrained or repercussions will occur in the community. Marisol Pierce Bonifaz (Wildwood student) read a statement regarding the importance of literacy and presented a petition signed by 32 people to retain the library paras. Katherine Moss (Wildwood staff) read a letter from parents about the importance of the library. Bob Boutilier (Wildwood parent) asked that the library budget line be increased and the paras be given a pay raise and an apology. Joanna Morse (Crocker Farm parent) asked that budgets cuts be refrained as literacy and research is critical to a child's learning. Vince O'Connor (community member) recommended that central office administrator salaries be cut to restore money for library paraeducators. Kerry Crosby (Wildwood parent) asked that libraries remain intact because independent reading would be compromised.

3. Approve Minutes 6:41p.m.

Ms. Hazzard moved to approve the minutes of January 19, 2016. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

4. Superintendent's Update

6:42 p.m.

Ms. Geryk announced that the Wildwood African American Read-In to Celebrate Black History Month and the Crocker Farm Amherst College Day were great successes. Mr. Morris stated that Fort River will receive free science materials through a CSTEM/NSF grant. Mr. Morris presented a brief update regarding the Amherst Elementary School Building Project and presented schematics.

5. New & Continuing Business

6:51 p.m.

A. FY16 2nd Quarter Update

DOCUMENT: Amherst Public Schools FY 2016 Second Quarter Budget Report

Mr. Mangano explained the document and solicited questions from the committee. There were no questions.

B. FY17 Budget Hearing

6:53 p.m.

DOCUMENTS: Budget Planning and Preparation Calendar; Amherst Public Schools FY17 Budget Additions/(Reductions) to Level Services Budget; Amherst Elementary Schools FY 2017 Proposed Budget (2/9/16)

Ms. Geryk stated that loss of school staff jobs will not occur. However, several district level jobs will be eliminated and people are currently faced with unemployment. Mr. Mangano explained the additions and reductions and the financial reasoning behind these decisions. Ms. Appy asked why a Wildwood classroom and teacher were added last year to accommodate student learning. Ms. Geryk stated it was a complicated situation which provided a remedy for many students, parents and staff. Mr. Mangano explained the budget and reasons for the financial gap (State Aid; Chapter 70; Charter and Choice Trends; Additions and Adjustments). Mr. Mangano explained how the district cuts would impact the Amherst budget. He went on to explain the school level staff reductions (library paraeducators and custodians). Ms. Geryk reminded the committee that these Amherst school staff would be shifted but not eliminated. Mr. Mangano explained OPEB and why these funds could not be used to restore the Amherst budget. In an effort to locate funds to restore the budget, Ms. Douangmany-Cage asked about the cost of the security cameras on buses and the costs for consultants. Mr. Mangano stated he would get these figures to the committee. Mr. Hood inquired about the projected costs of charter enrollments. A brief discussion followed. Mr. Mangano explained the distribution of total reductions. A discussion regarding the costs associated with the Amherst Elementary School Building Project followed. Ms. Douangmany-Cage inquired about the salary of the Media and Climate Communications Specialist. Ms. Geryk explained that the salary was divided amongst the Town of Amherst (20%), Amherst (40%) and Region (40%) budgets.

C. Budget Public Comment

7:32 p.m.

Manulani Sherlock (community member) inquired if the wireless upgrades were occurring because of the PARCC testing. Ms. Geryk stated that Amherst and Region schools did not implement the PARCC test. Mr. Mangano added that the wireless upgrades were necessary to accommodate the greater operating capacity of Chromebooks and other technology devices. Ms. Sherlock inquired about the e-rate reimbursement. Ms. Mangano explained the purpose of the e-rates and trends for connectivity. Ms. Sherlock inquired about the finding for consultants. Mr. Mangano explained that most of the money reserved for consultants is taken from the Region budget. Vince O'Connor (community member) recommended that the financial pie charts should not be used to prove a point at Town Meeting. He suggested removing the control account item and also using money from the reserve fund to re-instate the library paras. Ms. Geryk stated that control accounts are negotiated in good faith for staff raises and these will not be reduced. Caridad Martinez (community member) spoke to the demographics in the Amherst Elementary schools namely students of color comprising 51% of students. She is concerned that programs

and staff (library paras, ELE services coordinator) are being eliminated as the numbers of the most vulnerable students are increasing. She inquired about the race and socio-economic situations of those students leaving the schools to attend charter schools. Ms. Martinez inquired about the purpose of the Student Services Office. Ms. Geryk replied that this office is primarily responsible for special education, guidance, health and safety, and counseling. Ms. Martinez inquired about the proposed funding cut to the ARPS Family Center. She also inquired what “working school year” means in regards to the Director of Equity and Professional Development. Ms. Geryk responded that “school year” simply means an employee does not work during the summer months when school is not in session. Larry Kelley (community member) suggested the schools investigate the funding from UMASS tax-exempt housing promised to the Town of Amherst for educational re-imbursement. He believed that the schools are slated to receive \$120,000.00 in FY17 and \$60,000.00 in FY16. Mr. Mangano explained his perspective on this matter. Ms. Douangmany-Cage suggested that legal fees be reduced by utilizing mediation versus litigation. Mr. Hood suggested that the Finance Committee and BCG discuss ways to fund the school budget. Susan McQuaid (Crocker Farm librarian) presented an inspiring word cloud in which the terms *Friends*, *Library* and *Teachers* comprise the most important elements of the school community. She implored that the library paras be maintained in the budget. Ms. Douangmany-Cage thanked everyone who attended the meeting to support the library paras. In the respect of time to presenters, Ms. Appy suggested that agenda items E (Amherst Media Makers Space) and F (MCAS Opt-Out presentation) be moved up on the agenda.

D. Amherst Media Makers Space

7:59 p.m.

Ms. Appy welcomed Jim Lescault (Executive Director of Amherst Media), Stephen Brewer (President of the Amherst Media Board of Directors), Christine Olson and Charlie Schweik. Mr. Lescault thanked Mr. Hood for his support and also praised the partnership with the schools, VELA after school program and *Voices From Our Schools*. The group explained the purpose of makers space and several projects, workshops and events which occurred recently. They focused on town/gown programs and collaborations and how this work positively impacts the community. Ms. Douangmany-Cage asked if this type of program could potentially become an in-school class. She inquired if AEF funding could be utilized to create a 21st Century learning center with the ARPS Family Center so low income students could be exposed to STEM fields. Ms. Appy mentioned that makers spaces will be included in the new elementary school design and also invited the group to speak to the Regional School Committee at a future meeting. Mr. Morris praised Jerry Champagne and Trevor Takayama for their commitment to technology, humanities and STEAM. Mr. Schweik mentioned that Paula Rees of UMASS is building a STEM pipeline for girls in elementary school through high school. Mr. Lescault thanked Ms. Olson for her committed STEM work with young girls through the Youth Action Coalition.

E. MCAS Opt-Out Presentation

8:18 p.m.

DOCUMENTS: Proposed Resolution from the Amherst School Committee (2/9/15); Refusals to Take an Assessment

Ms. Appy introduced Max Page, former MSP President, who introduced a proposition to allow students to opt-out of standardized testing. After review of the document and a brief discussion, it was agreed that wordsmithing would be necessary. Ms. Douangmany-Cage suggested that “hold the Superintendent harmless” should be included in the proposal. Ms. Appy believed it should be made very clear that families know that consequences never existed or could occur if students choose to opt-out of standardized testing. Mr. Page encouraged the school committee to investigate this resolution and discuss it at greater length. Mr. Morris agreed to share the “Refusals to Take an Assessment” document with the committee.

F. Wellness Policy

8:34 p.m.

DOCUMENT: Amherst Public Schools, Pelham Elementary School, and Amherst-Pelham Regional District Policy Manual Policy: ADF

Ms. Geryk explained the reason for the language changes which were recently approved by the Pelham and Regional School Committees. Mr. Hood moved to accept the language changes made within the Wellness Policy. Ms. Hazzard seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

G. School Choice

8:37 p.m.

Mr. Hood moved to continue that Amherst Elementary Schools continue to be a school choice district. Ms. Hazard seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

H. Accept Gifts

8:38 p.m.

Ms. Hazzard moved to accept a gift from the Amherst Education Foundation in the amount of \$7,475.00 to support the Crocker Farm Preschool Playground. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

6. School Committee Planning

8:39 p.m.

The following topics were added to the March 22, 2016 meeting agenda: Opt-Out resolution discussion and Finance Committee funding options.

7. Adjournment

8:42 p.m.

Mr. Hood moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:42 p.m. Ms. Hazard seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kimberly Stender