

**Regular Meeting of the Amherst School Committee
Tuesday, February 14, 2012
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

In Attendance:

Irv Rhodes, Chair
Rick Hood
Rob Spence
Katherine Appy
Solomon Goldstein-Rose

Kathy Mazur, Human Resources Director
Rob Detweiler, Finance Director
Rhonda Cohen, Director of Teaching and Learning
Jerry Champagne, Information Systems Director
Monica Colley, Fort River Principal
Mike Morris, Crocker Farm Principal
Lisa Desjarlais, Pelham Principal
Nick Yaffe, Wildwood Principal
Press
Public
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

1. Welcome

7:00 p.m.

A. & B. Call to Order and Agenda Review--Mr. Rhodes called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and reviewed the agenda.

C. Approve Minutes--Ms. Appy made a motion to approve the minutes of January 17, 2012 as presented. Mr. Spence seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Public Comments

7:02 p.m.

Fort River parents Dennis Goeckel, John Kennedy, Jeannette Wicks-Lim, Karen Skofield, Walt Graff and Somat Joffrey made statements regarding concerns about class size targets, the size of the first grade classes at Fort River, and the potentially negative impact that accepting choice students may have on class sizes in Amherst. Mr. Rhodes thanked the parents for coming to speak to the school committee about this very important topic.

3. Superintendent's Update

7:16 p.m.

Mr. Rhodes noted that Ms. Geryk is not at tonight's meeting because she is ill. Instead of a Superintendent's Update, Mr. Morris presented a "Prezi" which is a method by which the Crocker Farm sixth grade students created online presentations about Crocker Farm. He noted that students created Prezis as a way to share more student work on the school website.

4. New and Continuing Business

7:21 p.m.

A. FY13 Budget Update

DOCUMENTS: Amherst Public Schools FY13 Budget Additions/Reductions

Mr. Morris distributed and reviewed the proposed additions and reductions for the FY13 Amherst budget. He noted that the current funding gap between the proposed budget and the town's budget increase guideline of 2.8% is \$218,200. Mr. Hood explained that Ms. Geryk has had conversations with Town Manager John Musante and the Finance Committee asking them to consider providing bridge funding to cover this gap for the upcoming year, and they are receptive to the idea. Mr. Morris also noted that the cuts as presented do not include adding an additional grade level of Spanish as required by policy. There were no comments or concerns expressed about that.

B. Class Size Targets (and School Choice)

DOCUMENTS: Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Enrollments Detail (from October 1, 2007 through October 1, 2011); Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Maria Geryk, Superintendent regarding Class Size with attached report; Amherst School District Enrollments as of 2/14/2012 for 9/2013

Ms. Mazur distributed and reviewed three documents that provide historical class size data from 2007 to present, current enrollment projections for 2013, and a draft of potential enrollments with school choice factored in. Mr. Hood asked what, if anything, could have been done differently to prevent the classes that are currently too large.

Ms. Mazur explained the process followed in determining staffing for each school. Mr. Spence noted that school choice will be beneficial when the district is struggling with either having larger than desirable classes or adding a classroom, which will result in classes that are too small. Mr. Hood asked if there is space within the buildings to add additional classes if necessary, particularly at Fort River. The principals each spoke regarding how the space is used within their buildings. Ms. Colley noted that at Fort River the use of the space would need to be reconfigured in order to add a classroom, which would require advance planning on the part of the school administration. Mr. Morris noted that all spaces at Crocker Farm are being used, but they would be able to reconfigure. Mr. Yaffe noted that all spaces are being used at Wildwood, and he believes it would be difficult to add another class. Mr. Rhodes noted that the School Committee also received information in their agenda packet regarding class size policies. He stated that the Policy Subcommittee will be presenting a draft policy to the Amherst School Committee for their consideration and a full discussion. Mr. Spence asked why there is not an Amherst policy subcommittee to draft elementary-specific policies. Mr. Rhodes explained that the Regional subcommittee has traditionally drafted policies for all three districts since there is only one shared policy manual. Ms. Appy questioned whether there should be a class size policy at all, expressing her concern that having a policy may be too restrictive for the Superintendent and principals. She suggested that it may be more appropriate to provide guidelines rather than a policy. After further discussion, the School Committee members were encouraged to forward any comments or suggestions about the class size policy to Ms. Westmoreland to share with the full Policy Subcommittee.

C. Time on Learning Study

Ms. Mazur provided background information regarding the state requirements for time on learning in the schools. Mr. Rhodes made a motion to vote to have a time on learning study conducted of the Amherst elementary schools by an organization or organizations capable of doing such a study and if the Regional School Committee votes to do the same we will join with them for a K-12 time on learning study. Mr. Spence seconded, but asked for discussion. Mr. Rhodes noted that the district’s time on learning has been questioned, so it seems prudent to have an outside group conduct a study to verify that we are meeting or exceeding state requirements. Mr. Rhodes asked if the Superintendent is in favor of such a study and Mr. Rhodes confirmed that she is. Mr. Goldstein-Rose moved to amend the motion by inserting the phrase “with one intention being to optimize learning time during the school day.” There was no second to his motion to amend. The original motion was then unanimously approved.

D. April Vacation Update

Ms. Mazur reported that approximately 20% of the staff has reported that they have plans for April vacation that cannot be changed if it becomes necessary to use part of the break to make up a snow closure day. She explained that staff members will be asked to demonstrate to Human Resources that they have an obligation that cannot be changed. If that requirement is met, staff members will be allowed to use any of their three available personal days to make up an absence during the break, or to participate in up to two professional days that will be determined by Rhonda Cohen, Director of Teaching and Learning. She noted that it has been suggested that staff be allowed to use sick days to make up any time, but that option has been rejected by the administration. Staff members who do not use any of these options will be required to take the time off without pay.

5. Policies **None**

6. Subcommittees **None**

7. School Committee Planning **8:21 p.m.**

A. Calendar—FY13 Final Budget Vote on March 6

B. Items for Future Agendas—Vote FY12 Cost Centers; Fort River and Wildwood Renovations—consideration of adding to capital plan

8. Adjournment **8:23 p.m.**

Mr. Hood made a motion to adjourn at 8:23 p.m. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland

APPROVED: March 20, 2012