

**Amherst School Committee
February 4, 2014
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

In Attendance:

Katherine Appy, Chair
Kathleen Traphagen
Rick Hood
Amilcar Shabazz (arrived @ 7:55)

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Kathy Mazur, Human Resources Director
Mike Morris, Director of Assessment & Evaluation
Sean Mangano, Director of Finance and Operations
Ron Bohonowicz, Facilities & Transportation Director
Nick Yaffe, Wildwood Principal
John Musante, Amherst Town Manager
Public and Press
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

Absent:

Lawrence O'Brien

1. Welcome 7:05 p.m.

A. Call to Order—Ms. Appy called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and reviewed the agenda.

B. Approve Minutes—Mr. Hood moved to approve the minutes of November 19, 2013. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Public Comments None

There were no public comments.

3. Superintendent's Update 7:08 p.m.

DOCUMENT: Superintendent's Updates, dated February 4, 2014

Ms. Geryk distributed a memo outlining a number of upcoming events and then provided highlights on several:

- Due to the impending winter storm, the decision has been made to close all schools tomorrow, February 5, 2014.
- Ms. Mazur reviewed the timeline for the Fort River principal search, noting that a letter has gone out to parents inviting participation on the search committee.
- Applications are being sought for the new ARPS Community-Building Award, which will honor a staff or faculty member from any department who has “helped to foster a sense of belonging among students and who had helped to build bridges of understanding and acceptance among them.”
- A community Sixth Grade Pancake Breakfast is scheduled for Saturday, February 22 at the North Hadley Sugar Shack to benefit the Sixth Grade Graduation Fund.
- Students in grades K-6 will be participating in a combined Music/Physical Education dance and rhythm unit throughout February.
- Wildwood students have launched a number of fund-raising events to benefit families directly affected by the Hadley fire in October, victims of the 2013 Philippines Typhoon and to support cancer research.
- An internet safety information session, jointly sponsored by the ARHS Family Center and Amherst Police Department, is scheduled for February 10 from 7:00-8:00 p.m. in the ARHS library.

4. Subcommittee Updates 7:12 p.m.

A. BCG—Mr. Hood reported that the Governor's Budget came in approximately \$290,000 less than anticipated. He noted that the Senate version is expected to be better, but is likely to come out later than usual, delaying when final figures will be available.

B. JCPC—Ms. Appy reported that JCPC met last week with the Amherst Police Department. She noted that the committee is asking to increase the amount of the tax levy used for capital projects to 7.6%.

C. RSDPB—Ms. Appy reported that the RSDPB was scheduled to meet at 7:00 p.m. tomorrow night, but the meeting will be rescheduled since school has been canceled so the meeting space will be unavailable.

4. New and Continuing Business 7:38 p.m.

A. MSBA Update

DOCUMENT: Letter from MSBA to Superintendent Maria Geryk dated November 20, 2013

Mr. Bohonowicz reviewed the process for the Wildwood MSBA project moving forward. He noted that the district submitted the names of the School Building Committee members to MSBA last week and expect to receive approval within two weeks. Mr. Musante expressed his firm support for the project, noting that it is the right thing to do to ensure an excellent educational experience for Amherst's children. Ms. Traphagen asked about the timeline for the project. Mr.

Bohonowicz explained that MSBA will notify the district on September 2, 2014 whether we are invited into the process to start a feasibility study. He noted that to move forward, the Spring Town Meeting has to commit to a willingness to fund the entire study and to be reimbursed after completion. Ms. Appy asked what the percentage of reimbursement is from MSBA. Mr. Bohonowicz said that the last project, the Middle School Windows Project, was reimbursed at approximately 60% and this project is likely to be the same. He noted that the total cost of feasibility studies range from approximately \$490,000 to \$2 million. Ms. Appy thanked Mr. Bohonowicz for bringing the district to this point by continuing to submit proposals to MSBA over the years.

B. FY15 Budget Presentation

DOCUMENTS: FY15 Amherst Schools Budget Information Binder

Ms. Geryk briefly reviewed the process that was followed in developing the FY15 Amherst Schools budget proposal. She noted that cost cutting measures and long-term planning is starting to pay dividends and, for the first time in many years, no cuts are necessary for the upcoming fiscal year. Mr. Mangano provided an overview of the types of information included in the binder. Mr. Morris then reviewed the increases projected in the FY15 budget, including:

- \$139,000 for the Arts
- \$9,650 for the Family Center and Steps to Success
- \$87,000 for Equity work including vouchers for the After School Program, Full Day Preschool and funding Calvin Terrell to work with elementary school students
- \$78,621 from Professional Development for Universal Design for Learni, PBIS, Anti-Bullying, and additional support and collaboration in math and ELA
- \$11,810 for miscellaneous expenses

Mr. Morris also reviewed reductions that will be realized through decreased costs in retiree health insurance, unemployment liability, retirement incentives and no sabbaticals, which total \$164,442. Ms. Geryk noted that this is a very responsive budget that moves our system forward and still comes in \$100,000 less than the originally targeted increase of 2.7%. Mr. Hood asked if the budget has been put on the website yet. Mr. Mangano said it will be posted. Mr. Morris expressed thanks to the specialist teachers, noting that last year was very difficult for them and they are the right people to be doing this K-12 work in the arts. Ms. Traphagen expressed her appreciation for the initiative in increasing the arts and integrating it into the curriculum. She noted that the specialists' relationship with children and families over the years will be very beneficial. Ms. Traphagen reminded the committee that the beginning year of strings instruction was moved from 3rd grade from 4th grade and asked if the district would be in a position to bring it back since the budget is coming in under 2.7%. Ms. Geryk noted that it can be looked at, but it can be challenging to the schedule the instruction time. She said she will have more information when the budget is discussed at the next meeting. Mr. Hood encouraged the public to read pages 28 and 29 of the budget proposal for some good historic information about the budgets in the past. Ms. Appy said that she is also thrilled to know that the specialists will be increased again and feels the arts integration model is very exciting. She noted that it would be great if it is possible to add anything with the \$100,000. Ms. Geryk noted that she would not want to put something in place using those funds that would have to be cut next year, so she needs to look more closely at what potential increases would mean to future budgets. She will share that information at the next meeting.

C. Resolution Letter to MASC

DOCUMENTS: Letter to Glenn Koocher at MASC regarding Praxis Testing

Mr. Hood moved to approve the letter from the Amherst School Committee encouraging MASC to advocate for acceptance of PRAXIS testing for teacher licensure. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

5. School Committee Planning

None

8. Adjournment

8:05 p.m.

Mr. Hood moved to adjourn at 8:05 p.m. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland