

Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee Meeting
Tuesday, December 10, 2013
Library, Amherst Regional High School

In Attendance:

Kip Fonsh, Chair	Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Trevor Baptiste	Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Lawrence O'Brien	Mike Morris, Director of Evaluation and Assessment
Debbie Gould	Jerry Champagne, Information Systems Director
Trevor Baptiste	Jo Ann Smith, Student Services Administrator
Katherine Appy	Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
Amilcar Shabazz	Betsy Dinger, ARMS Principal
Rick Hood	David Slovin, SEC Principal
Michael DeChiara	Mike Malone, ARMS Assistant Principal
	Jean Fay, APEA President
	Mary Custard, ARHS Dean of Students
	Chris Overtree, UMass Partner
	Sara Whitcomb, UMass Partner
	Sarah Fefer, UMass Partner
	Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder
	Public and Press

1. Welcome and Agenda Review

7:04 PM

A. Call to Order and Agenda Review

Mr. Fonsh called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. and welcomed everyone to the meeting. He reviewed the agenda and the summary memo and asked if any member of the committee feels there needs to be changes to the time allotted to each item. There were no changes.

2. Public Comments

7:07 p.m.

Allie Wicks-Lim, parent, spoke in support of the nut restriction in the schools and read a letter from her child's food allergies specialist from Massachusetts General Hospital who also supports the restrictions. Samaht Jaffre, Fort River parent, also spoke in support of keeping the nut restriction in place, noting that she does not have a food allergic child but has complied with food allergy restrictions since her child entered preschool. Ray LaRoja, policy analyst and political science professor, noted that he is sympathetic to families who must deal with food allergies but he does not believe the nut restriction should be put in place. He noted that emphasis should be on training school personnel and expressed his opinion that the difficulty with enforcing this policy encourages students to blatantly disregard it. June Lee, parent, spoke in favor of the nut restrictions, noting that it is simply an adjustment for six hours per day during the school year and it protects students lives. Brenda Bush-Howes, policy scholar, spoke about the nut restriction as a flawed policy, noting that she wants to read the report from the Wellness Committee to see the research. She encouraged distribution of the research the policy was based on and noted that there should have been much more discussion at the School Committee level. Jean Sherlock, grandparent, noted that there is a lot of discipline other than suspensions going on in the schools. She recounted two stories of bi-racial students who received lunch detentions at the middle school, noting that these types of disciplinary actions do not show up in the data. Vince O'Connor, Amherst resident, made statements in support of the trimester system, his concerns that ELL students in the Middle School are encouraged more often to "check out" Smith Vocational High School, and his belief that college advising needs to meet the needs of students who are low income and interested in athletics.

3. Subcommittee Updates

7:37 PM

AEF Representative—Mr. Hood noted that Thursday is Valley Gives Day and encouraged everyone to donate to AEF on that day.

Budget Subcommittee—Mr. Hood reported on the subcommittee meeting held earlier in the evening, which included discussion of the Capital Plan, FY15 budget status, OPEB and per pupil costs. The next meeting is December 17th in the ARHS library.

Amherst Media Representative—Mr. Hood reported that Amherst Media has obtained a loan to buy the land for their new building.

RSDPB—Mr. Fonsh reported that the Board met last Thursday night and read the motion that was unanimously approved:

To amend the current 7-12 agreement to a preK-12 agreement with the option that one of the existing four towns can remain 7-12 as long as that town is not Amherst, and that the town that remained 7-12 has the option to become a preK-12 member within a specified period of time, and that the town that remained 7-12 can negotiate with the Regional School Committee regarding shared superintendency services for their preK-6 school.

He noted that the motion will be sent to Christine Lynch at DESE to make sure it is acceptable. Ms. Appy, Amherst representative to the Board, reported that she is very pleased with the motion and believes it can offer a lot of benefit to Amherst's students. Mr. Baptiste, Pelham Representative to the Board, reported noted that the number of variables to the hybrid model makes him concerned that it is less likely to pass, but it would be an incremental "glacial" step in regionalization if it does pass. Mr. DeChiara, Shutesbury representative to the Board, said that the Shutesbury representatives were pleasantly surprised by the outcome. He agreed it is an incremental step, but noted that it is a change from the status quo and is moving in the right direction.

4. Superintendent's Update

8:05 PM

Jean Fay, APEA President, gave a brief report on the 2nd Annual Safe School Summit on Youth Mental Health which was held on Wednesday, November 20th. Ms. Fay is a member of Northwestern District Attorney Dave Sullivan's Citizen Advisory Board and played a major role in planning the summit. She noted that the summit this year focused on training staff members that often do not get to participate in such training, including bus drivers, secretaries, cafeteria monitors and others along with teachers and administrators. Ms. Fay reported that she has been asked to help plan a state-wide summit for next year. Mr. O'Brien said he was pleased to know that training has moved beyond the classroom teacher to other staff members. He asked if there is any way the School Committee can support this work. Ms. Fay said she will be reaching out as planning begins for the state-wide summit. Ms. Traphagan asked if there are plans for any follow-up training. Ms. Fay reported that there will be an evening workshop for MTA paraeducators on January 22nd.

5. New and Continuing Business

8:20 p.m.

A. ICE Presentation

Dr. Brady introduced Lyndsey Nunes, MS Ed, BCBA ICE Program Coordinator for Westfield State University; Rachael Hougen, ICE Program Coordinator for UMass; Laurel Peltier, Secondary Special Education Program Coordinator; Kim Kretzer, Special Education Teacher in the ARHS Pathways to Independence Program; and Catherine Manicke, SLP in the Pathways to Independence Program. They provided a report on the district's Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment (ICE) program for students with severe intellectual disabilities. The program, which is grant funded, allows participating students to access the college experience by working with college peers their age while attending classes and participating in activities. Amherst has an active partnership with Westfield State University and UMass. Katherine and Alex Monica spoke to the School Committee about the program from the student and parent perspective, both noting the strong positive impact the program has had for Alex. After brief clarifying questions and comments from the School Committee, Mr. Fonsh thanked the presenters for speaking about this powerful program.

B. Behavioral/Discipline Data Plan

DOCUMENTS: Behavioral/Discipline Data Update—December 2013

Superintendent Geryk noted that tonight's presentation will include data about discipline and behavioral supports the district is putting in place. She stated that the district's response to disparate discipline data must be multi-layered and include professional development for teachers, changes in how we respond to student behavior, changes to the code of conduct and reflection on how we have dealt with discipline in the past. Mr. Morris and Dr. Brady reviewed highlights of the discipline trends data report that was provided to the School Committee in advance of the meeting. Ms. Dinger and Mr. Jackson reported on school climate initiatives, including the Intergenerational Equity Group at the Middle School and PBIS at the High School. Dr. Brady outlined ways in which the district is transforming practice from being reactive to proactive, and Mr. Morris spoke about cultural

proficiency training in the district and efforts to move from the awareness phase to action steps. Mr. DeChiara asked how the effectiveness of PBIS is being measured. Sarah Whitcomb, UMass partner, explained she has a team of graduate students at each school location and the teams are focusing on looking at unstructured contacts and school-wide expectations around contacts. Mr. O'Brien asked why any school district continues to use out-of-school suspension when research has proven that it has a very limited, if not negative, impact on learning. Ms. Geryk stated that our district, like most, is still a very traditional system when it comes to discipline. She noted that it is challenging to take away the only disciplinary tools a district has in place before staff have been trained in better methods. Ms. Geryk stated that the district is waiting to see if the state puts in place a moratorium on suspensions for anything other than major offenses such as assault based on the REAC recommendations. Mr. O'Brien asked if it is a goal of the district to eliminate out-of-school suspension once we have a more efficacious system, and Ms. Geryk confirmed that it is. Mr. Shabazz stated that he finds any linkage of food to regulation of behavior very concerning, and noted that he would like to see that taken off the table as a disciplinary tool. He noted that the first response of adults to inappropriate student behavior should be to try to understand what the student's needs are, not just to write up a discipline report. Ms. Geryk stated that she agrees that adults should come from a student-focused perspective when they interact with students and spoke about efforts to work with the adults in the district to develop this. She said that she also agrees that she does not like to see discipline related to food, but taking students away from the social time of lunch is one of the disciplinary tools. She noted that students are never denied food at lunch, however. Ms. Appy stated that she was struck by the significant cultural shift we are trying to achieve around discipline in the district. She asked what schools have in place now to help students stay in classes and access their education. Ms. Geryk noted that PBIS has been in place for three years at the elementary level and the district has moved much further in working with students in ways that do not take them out of the classroom. She said that the PBIS work has just begun at the secondary level and, as of now, having deans and teachers that develop strong relationships with students is what works best. Dr. Brady talked about the explicit discussions and training opportunities that are occurring with staff to help them develop the skills to work with students without having to remove them from their classrooms. Ms. Traphagen asked how the structure of the school day is being looked at with regard to its impact on the behavioral expectations for students, as well as how faculty and staff are being supported in developing the expected PBIS skills in the workplace setting. Dr. Whitcomb noted that a lot of work went into developing the expectations and core values for each school, which really enhanced the readiness of staff in each building. She acknowledged the difficulty of meeting learning and behavioral expectations for all students at a developmentally appropriate way, noting that there is a lot of staff collaboration around best practices. Mr. Hood noted that it would be helpful to set a concrete, numerical goal for measuring improvement in discipline to keep progress on the goal visible for everyone. Mr. Baptiste stated that he is encouraged to hear that attention is being paid to the potential role of cultural bias in discipline disparity. He noted that training students to operate effectively in an environment that may be culturally challenging to them is laudable work, but it should not be done in lieu of examining the district culture for privilege. Ms. Gould asked if PBIS is still tracking behavior over the course of the day so the data can be used to restructure the day if necessary. Mr. Morris explained that it is the goal to track the data in that way, but the challenge as a system is to define the expectations and align them district-wide across all schools. He stated that the district is working on that as a goal. At 10:00, Mr. Fonsh asked the committee if they would like to continue the discussion since it has gone well beyond the published end time. It was agreed to continue for another 10 minutes. Mr. Shabazz asked if the district needs additional financial resources or personnel in order to speed up the process of improving our record on discipline issues. Ms. Geryk noted that she does not believe more people are needed on the team. She said it takes time to norm all of the discipline data and to train all adults in how to consistently and accurately enter data into the system. After further discussion by the committee, Mr. Jackson made a brief statement regarding the need to have suspension as a disciplinary tool for some very egregious behaviors at the high school level. Mr. Fonsh thanked the administrative team and the UMass partners for coming for this very important discussion.

C. School Committee Statement to MASC

Document: Draft Statement to Glenn Koocher, Executive Director of MASC

At Mr. Fonsh's request, Mr. DeChiara briefly reviewed his suggested changes to the proposed school committee statement to MASC encouraging them to support PARRC testing for initial licensure. Ms. Appy noted that she suggested that the letter be from all three school committees as well. Mr. Hood moved to approve the letter to Glenn Koocher with the date changed to December 10th. Mr. O'Brien seconded and brief discussion followed. It

was agreed to send three separate letters rather than one letter from all three committees and the motion was unanimously approved.

6. School Committee Planning

10:27 p.m.

A. Calendar—January 14 is next Regional meeting. Upcoming topics include FY15 budget and a policy/allergy plan discussion.

7. Adjournment

10:27 p.m.

Ms. Gould moved to adjourn at 10:27 p.m. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland