

**Joint Meeting of the Amherst, Pelham and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committees  
Tuesday, April 29, 2014  
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

**In Attendance:**

Katherine Appy, Amherst Chair/Region  
Michael DeChiara, Region  
Debbie Gould, Pelham Chair  
Lawrence O'Brien, Amherst/Region Vice-Chair  
Kathleen Traphagen, Amherst/Region  
Trevor Baptiste, Pelham/Region  
Emily Marriott, Pelham  
Rick Hood, Amherst/Region  
Amilcar Shabazz, Amherst/Region  
Dan Robb, Pelham

Maria Geryk, Superintendent  
Kathryn Mazur, Human Resources Director  
Faye Brady, Director of Student Services  
JoAnn Smith, Student Services Administrator  
Mike Morris, Director of Evaluation and Assessment  
Betsy Dinger, ARMS Principal  
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal  
Jerry Champagne, Information Systems Director  
Sean Mangano, Assistant Finance Director  
Ron Bohonowicz, Director of Facilities and Transportation  
Doug Slaughter, Data Analyst  
Public and Press  
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

**Absent:**

Darius Modestow, Pelham  
Kip Fonsh, Region

**1. Welcome and Call to Order**

**7:00 p.m.**

**A. Call to Order**—Mr. O'Brien called the Regional School Committee to order at 7:00 p.m., and Ms. Gould called the Pelham Committee to order. Ms. Geryk called the Amherst School Committee to order, noting that the Committee must reorganize since there was an election since their last meeting. She asked for nominations for Chair and Mr. O'Brien nominated, which was unanimously approved. Ms. Appy said she would like to nominate Ms. Traphagen to serve as Vice-Chair if she is willing to do so. Ms. Traphagen agreed and her appointment as Vice-Chair was unanimously approved. Ms. Appy asked for nominations for Secretary. Mr. Hood volunteered to continue serving in that capacity, and his appointment as secretary was unanimously approved. Mr. O'Brien reviewed the agenda and asked if any changes are needed. Mr. Hood requested that the District Trends Subcommittee be added to the subcommittee reports section so members can be appointed. Ms. Appy noted that the Regional and Pelham School Committees will adjourn after the Facilities Update since the final agenda item is Amherst specific.

**B. Minutes**—Mr. DeChiara moved to approve the minutes of the March 25, 2014 joint meeting. Two corrections were noted, including correction of the spelling of one of the public commenter's name (Mr. Mangeau) and a notation that Mr. DeChiara left the meeting at 8:26 p.m. The motion to approve the minutes as amended was then approved with Ms. Appy and Mr. DeChiara abstaining. Mr. DeChiara then moved to approve the minutes of the April 8, 2014 Regional meeting. No corrections were noted and the motion was approved unanimously.

**2. Announcements and Public Comments**

**7:11 p.m.**

Katie Lazdowski, community member, spoke about the recent incidents at the high school. She noted that, as an educator herself, she encourages the district to be proactive in our approach to safety rather than reactive. Malulani Sherlock, parent, introduced her children and then spoke about high stakes testing. She noted that her 8th grade son was able to make the decision to opt out of the MCAS testing, but her fifth grade child was not allowed to because she cannot speak for herself due to being differently abled. Ms. Sherlock encouraged the School Committee to advocate for an end to high-stakes testing in our schools. Mary Lou Conca, grandparent, spoke about the use of lunch detention as a punishment noting that she encourages the School Committee to take up the issue for discussion. Susan Theberge, community member, stated that there is an incredible depth of passion and concern in the community about what happened to Carolyn Gardner and noted that the community wants to know what is happening regarding the incident. She also shared *Rethinking Schools* as an excellent resource regarding the impact of high stakes testing on public schools and encouraged that a public reading/talk back be scheduled utilizing it as a tool. Victor Nunez-Ortiz, Crocker Farm parent, spoke about the lockdown at Crocker Farm Elementary on March 28th, noting that the police visited his home in searching for the unidentified person in the school. He stated that he only learned yesterday that six other families were visited by police which meant he spent a month thinking he had been targeted. He said much more information is needed about safety in the schools and the protocols followed in lockdown situations. Sovann-Malis Loeung, Crocker Farm parent, spoke about continuing discipline disparities in the schools. She noted that she wants to hear more about steps that are being taken to address these issues. Mr. DeChiara noted that this will be his last meeting as a member of the Regional School Committee and expressed his appreciation for the

support of his colleagues. Members of the committee and Ms. Geryk recognized Mr. DeChiara for his many contributions to the Regional School Committee and thanked him for his service.

### **3. Subcommittee Updates**

**7:26 p.m.**

**A. AEF Representative**—Mr. Hood noted that the Spring Sprint is this Saturday.

**B. Budget Subcommittee**—Ms. Geryk noted that the school budgets are scheduled for consideration at the Amherst Town Meeting on May 7th. The other three towns will vote on the school budgets at their Town Meetings this Saturday.

**C. Policy Subcommittee**—Mr. Baptiste reported that the Policy Subcommittee met yesterday. The policies that will next be considered, in order, are Investments, Fingerprinting, Collections and Life Threatening Allergies.

**D. The Collaborative**—Mr. Baptiste noted that Mr. Diehl, Executive Director of The Collaborative, is scheduled to meet with him and Ms. Geryk on May 9<sup>th</sup>. There was brief discussion of the need for all three school committees to vote on the new Articles of Agreement before the end of the school year.

**E. RAWG**—Ms. Appy reported that the various RAWG subcommittees have been meeting. She noted that the full group is meeting at 7:00 p.m. on May 8 and May 22 in the PD Center at ARMS, and the Amherst and Pelham Regionalization Committees are meeting together on May 6.

**F. SETF**—Mr. Shabazz reported that an invitation has been sent to Jean Fay, APEA President, inviting the APEA to appoint two teachers to the task force. He noted that Ms. Fay asked if the representatives had to be members of the teaching staff or if there will be a way for members of the other employee units to participate. Mr. Shabazz noted that he would like to find a way to structure the SETF so that there is a core voting group, as was approved by the School Committee, and other non-voting, working groups. This would allow all voices to be heard. It was agreed that this will be a topic on the next Regional School Committee agenda.

**G. District Trends**—Mr. Hood noted that volunteers are needed for this new subcommittee. Discussion followed regarding whether the Amherst and Pelham School Committees should have similar subcommittees or appoint members to the Regional Subcommittee. After discussion, Mr. O'Brien moved that the Amherst School Committee appoint a member or members to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee's District Trends subcommittee to track trends at the elementary level. Ms. Traphagen seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Mr. Baptiste moved that the Pelham School Committee appoint a member or members to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee's District Trends subcommittee to track trends at the elementary level. Mr. Robb seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Mr. O'Brien, Ms. Traphagen, and Ms. Marriott volunteered to join Mr. Hood as members.

### **4. Superintendent's Updates**

**7:45 p.m.**

***DOCUMENT: Superintendent's Update to the Amherst, Pelham and Regional School Committees dated April 29, 2014***

Ms. Geryk distributed and briefly reviewed updates on recent and upcoming events and accomplishments in the district. She noted that the Cambodian New Year celebration is May 2 at 1:30 p.m., the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual African American Achievement Night is May 2 at 6:30 p.m., and the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Latino Achievement Night is May 16 at 6:30 p.m. Ms. Appy mentioned that she attended the ABC House Fundraiser at the Amherst College Field House just prior to tonight's School Committee meeting. She noted that it was very well attended and spotlighted the work of this outstanding organization.

### **5. New and Continuing Business**

**7:50 p.m.**

#### **A. Information Systems Update**

***DOCUMENT: Information Systems Annual Update dated April 2014***

Mr. Champagne provided an annual update on the work of the Information Systems department, including the numerous upgrades that were performed since the summer and upcoming projects for 2014-2015. Discussion followed, with Mr. Champagne answering clarifying questions for members of the School Committee. Mr. O'Brien expressed appreciation to Mr. Champagne for the presentation and for the outstanding work of his department.

#### **B. Facilities Department Update**

***DOCUMENT: Facilities Overview dated April 27, 2014***

Mr. Bohonowicz provided an annual update on the work of the Facilities and Transportation department, including information on major projects completed and currently underway, as well as projects planned for the 2014-2015 school year.

Discussion followed, with Mr. Bohonowicz answering clarifying questions for members of the School Committee. Mr. O'Brien expressed appreciation to Mr. Bohonowicz for the presentation and for the outstanding work of his department.

### **C. Accept Gifts**

**DOCUMENT: Memo to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee from Mary Wallace, District Treasurer, dated April 18, 2014**

Ms. Gould moved to accept \$43.69 from Rachel Simmons for the ARMS principal's discretion; \$800 from Graham Holdings Matching Gifts Program for the ARHS Theater teaching, equipment repair and supplies; \$500 from Jones Group Realtors for the General Scholarship fund for 2014; and \$2,500 from Williams College for the Award for Excellence in Teaching for Sara Barber-Just for support of the ARHS educational program. Mr. Baptiste seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

After gifts were approved, Ms. Marriott moved and Mr. Baptiste seconded that the Pelham School Committee adjourn at 9:17 p.m. The motion was unanimously approved. Mr. O'Brien noted that a change has come up during the meeting requiring the Regional School Committee to enter Executive Session according to MA General Law Section 21a4 to discuss the deployment of security personnel or devices, or strategies with respect thereto with no intention of returning to open session. By unanimous roll call vote, the Regional School Committee entered Executive Session, and Ms. Appy declared a recess of the Amherst School Committee until after the Executive Session.

Ms. Appy called the Amherst School Committee back to order at 9:50 p.m. for the following Amherst specific business.

### **D. MSBA WW Feasibility Study Update**

**DOCUMENT: Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Ron Bohonowicz, Michael Morris and Kathryn Mazur regarding Organization of the Elementary Schools dated April 28, 2014**

Mr. Bohonowicz reported on the next steps as the district works to be invited into the MSBA process, noting that we have provided four of the five deliverables required by MSBA. Mr. Morris read a memo outlining what the feasibility study entails, noting that the primary purpose is to determine a preferred solution to any building issues. He reported that MSBA encouraged the district to look at multiple options if we are invited into the process, not just at renovation of one building. Mr. Morris stated that it is also important to look at long-term viability of any options considered and outlined three options administration would like to explore:

1. renovating the existing Wildwood building in a significant way;
2. rebuilding a new K-6 Wildwood School; and
3. exploring potential organizational shifts of the elementary schools based on declining enrollments, which would include building a larger building on the Wildwood site.

Ms. Geryk noted that if the district is invited into the feasibility study there will be many opportunities for public dialogue and input. She noted that the district wants to ensure that the School Committee is in support of moving forward with the three potential options for consideration since the School Committee would be responsible for the final decision if the most viable option is determined to be an organizational shift. Discussion followed. Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Hood both expressed appreciation for considering a grade-level structure for the elementary schools. Ms. Traphagen noted that she supports exploring all of the three options to determine which is most viable. Ms. Appy noted that she will speak to the warrant article on behalf of the School Committee at Town Meeting, and Ms. Geryk, Mr. Bohonowicz, Mr. Morris, Mr. Mangano and Ms. Mazur will be in attendance to answer questions or concerns. Discussion followed regarding the materials needed to inform Town Meeting members about the issue and whether to request a move of when the warrant articles will be considered.

## **6. Adjournment**

**10:16 p.m.**

Mr. O'Brien moved to adjourn the Amherst School Committee at 10:16 p.m. Mr. Hood seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Debbie Westmoreland

Approved May 27, 2014