

**Amherst School Committee Meeting
Tuesday, April 25, 2017
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

IN ATTENDANCE

Phoebe Hazzard
Peter Demling
Anastasia Ordonez
Eric Nakajima
Vira Douangmany-Cage

Mike Morris, Interim Superintendent
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Derek Shea, Principal, Crocker Farm
Diane Chamberlain, Principal, Fort River
Nick Yaffe, Principal, Wildwood
Wendy Bloomenthal, Recorder

1. Call to Order and Approve Minutes

6:01 p.m.

Dr. Morris called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. and asked for nominations for Chair. M. Nakajima nominated Ms. Hazzard. Ms. Hazzard accepted. Mr. Demling seconded and the nomination was unanimously approved. Ms. Hazzard requested nominations for Vice Chair and nominated Ms. Ordonez. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the nomination was unanimously approved. Ms. Hazzard requested nominations for the Representative of Union 26. Ms. Ordonez nominated Ms. Douangmany-Cage, who declined the nomination. Ms. Douangmany-Cage nominated Mr. Demling. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the nomination was unanimously approved. Ms. Hazzard requested two school committee representatives to join the Joint Capital Planning committee (JCPC). Ms. Hazzard and Mr. Nakajima volunteered. Ms. Ordonez moved to approve the minutes from March 15, 2017. The motion was seconded by Ms. Douangmany-Cage and approved 4:1 with Mr. Demling abstaining.

2. Announcements and Public Comment

6:05 p.m.

Mr. Demling shared interest in ensuring that Amherst School Committee has representation at upcoming events: Amherst Town Meeting, 4/26/17 and 4/27/17, specifically regarding Article 9; Forum on State Funding for Public Schools, Easthampton High School, 4/27/17. Dr. Morris identified Article 9 as the operating budget for all town departments and noted that there are multiple articles relative to the schools. Dr. Morris reported that the school district is considering a request of Town Meeting that would schedule school related articles for May 8, 2017. Ms. Hazzard has the written language prepared for such a request of Town Meeting. Dr. Morris requested that further discussion and a decision regarding said potential request of Town Meeting be held until the end of tonight's school committee meeting.

Ms. Hazzard requested an extension of public comment time to total 40 minutes rather than the identified 10 minutes on the agenda. No objections were presented.

- 1) K. Appy thanked the school committee members for their service to students and read a letter of support for the feasibility study at Fort River. Ms. Appy stated that with the recent failed building project, the schools would not be in receipt of the projected energy and operational savings; encouraged school committee members to advocate with the Town to offset the lost savings deficit; to fully fund the budget guidance gap, and to receive the same budget increases as other town departments.
- 2) L. Solowiej stated that her children "have had a wonderful experience at Fort River, in spite of the building." Ms. Solowiej expressed concern the recent failed building project may result in the loss of talented colleagues and/or negatively impact the search for a Superintendent. Ms. Solowiej presented additional concerns and advocacy needs in the areas of: the need for building to have access to natural light, specifically for special education programs; parent choice in special education programs, consideration of student placement upon graduation from a special education program; transportation of special education students; urgent need to support the feasibility study.
- 3) A. Swift reported that as a resident of Applewood and a member of an "aging demographic," she is in support of the schools and a timely feasibility study.
- 4) T. Neale, member of Town Finance Committee, expressed interest in commenting after the topic of the feasibility study occurred in the agenda. School Committee consensus was to not expand public comment into additional agenda items.
- 5) J. Newman thanked school committee members for their time and service. Ms. Newman expressed support of the recently failed school building project; shared concerns regarding current infrastructure; and advocated for the

redirection of funds for the boiler replacement at Wildwood to instead go to the feasibility study at Fort River, stating "Don't sink money into a building that is fundamentally flawed."

- 6) H. Smith thanked the school committee members. Ms. Smith shared additional gratitude to the Amherst Schools for advocacy and work with special education students. Ms. Smith expressed the importance of special education students to attend school with their siblings and neighbors. Ms. Smith highlighted infrastructure problem and encouraged school committee members to redirect funds to a full feasibility study at Fort River.
- 7) S. Arwade urged school committee members to invest in long term infrastructure "rather than boilers and roofs."
- 8) M. Clark expressed "dismay" over the recently failed building project, and stated that "infrastructure related to equity."
- 9) I. Dojourse requested additional information on the scope of the roof analysis and the boiler. Questioned whether or not consideration had been taken that if the Wildwood boiler is replaced, can it be converted to gas in the future - pending a lift on the moratorium? Ms. Dojourse expressed support of a full feasibility study at Fort River and encouraged the use of architects who specialize in school remodeling.
- 10) F. Callahan reported that Town Meeting Articles 1-7 are in the consent calendar and are anticipated to move quickly. Article 9 (with two school budgets are near the top). Ms. Callahan encouraged the school committee to be in touch with the Town Moderator regarding scheduling. Ms. Hazzard responded that communication with the Moderator is taking place.
- 11) B. Hazlip shared support of a fully funded feasibility study.
- 12) J. Coleman urged school committee members to aggressively pursue a feasibility study, and expressed concern that the recently failed building project may negatively impact new families and professionals who are considering moving to the area.
- 13) D. Menikoff spoke on his opposition to the recent building project plan, and extended a shared commitment to addressing the needs of Amherst K-6 schools.
- 14) K. Holeverd posited questions regarding why are specialized programs housed in schools with the poorest infrastructure?
- 15) Parent of CF first grader questioned what will happen to the affordable preschool option and transportation, urging school committee members to keep these needs at the forefront of upcoming decisions.

3. Interim Superintendent's Update

6:44 p.m.

DOCUMENT: Interim Superintendent's Update to the Amherst School Committee dated April 25, 2017

Dr. Morris acknowledged that 4/26/17 is National Administrative Professional's day and encouraged people to take part in celebrating said individuals, as well as to learn more about the annual clerical/media awards. Dr. Morris thanked the Information Systems staff and the Principals for a successful and smooth first year of online MCAS in grade 4. Ms. Ordonez requested information regarding how many students had opted out of MCAS. Dr. Morris reported (for grades 3-6) a decrease in opt out students vs. 2015-2016.

4. New and Continuing Business

6:52 p.m.

A. Follow-up to Failed Building Project Vote

DOCUMENT: Post-Building Project Presentation dated April 25, 2017

Ms. Hazzard read a prepared statement. Mr. Demling spoke on the notion and importance of coming together in the sense of urgency; the need for a shared and explicit plan; and the political will that is present in the community. Dr. Morris thanked the public for attending and introduced his pending presentation. A condensed version of tonight's presentation is forthcoming at building level faculty meetings as well as with Parent Guardian Organizations. Future opportunities will be made available for public involvement and feedback. Dr. Morris emphasized that students and staff need the decision makers to act in their best interest, based on the variables and resources that are available at present, and urged that resolution of the dual realities (see powerpoint) occur as soon as possible in order to maximize student learning.

Financial:

Mr. Demling inquired about the identification of \$800,000 + in cuts that have been made. Dr. Morris agreed to provide an itemized list of said cuts to the school committee at a future meeting.

Ms. Ordonez inquired about sunseting grants and status of reimbursements - specifically questioning if the district is looking to outside partnerships and higher education collaborations. Mr. Mangano shared Higher Ed. support of the Family Center; collaboration with UMASS to explore the impacts of and resolution to the tax exempt issue of international students with attending children who the district receives zero financial assistance for. Mr. Nakajima spoke regarding the challenges born of the town passing the charter school monies (cuts) through to the schools; other budgetary challenges; and emphasized the need for local conversation(s) and resolution. Mr. Demling expressed the need for a conversation and explicit understanding between the Town and the District in regards to cost per pupil. Ms. Douangmany-Cage spoke on the

importance of advocacy to effect change, specifically in the areas of Chapter 70 and Charter Reimbursement. Ms. Douangmany-Cage shared recent experiences of actively participating in the Day on the Hill event, and concurred that both school committees need an increased presence at events such as the public forum in Easthampton on Thursday, April 27. Ms. Ordonez noted that there is an enhanced energy and advocacy surrounding the topic of Chapter 70 funding, among an increasing amount of school districts. Ms. Ordonez called for increased legislative pressure, while also acknowledging the legislative conversations is a long term process. Ms. Ordonez noted the need for local, doable actions to engage people in now. Ms. Hazzard questioned the implication on the current budget in regards to the sunseting of the preschool grant. Dr. Morris confirmed that said figures have been worked into the current budget.

Enrollment:

For purposes of this presentation and conversation, Dr. Morris highlighted the need to separate the enrollment challenges from the infrastructure challenges. Additionally, Dr. Morris emphasized that enrollment policies are fully in the hands of school committee and Superintendent. Dr. Morris distinguished between Economically Disadvantaged Percentages vs. Free-Reduced Lunch within *Current Rates of Poverty*. Dr. Morris expressed concern regarding the imbalance of equity in relation to the concentration of poverty between Amherst schools. Ms. Douangmany-Cage spoke briefly regarding the opportunity gap and the impact of standardized tests. Mr. Nakajima suggested that districting decisions made years ago, could not have been created as a permanent solution, and echoed Dr. Morris regarding the importance of a current districting discussion & revised policy based on the conditions and variables of today. Mr. Nakajima stated that the goal of closing the achievement gap; a thorough infrastructure conversation; and addressing the myriad of enrollment challenges all fit together and the essentialness of the community-at-large having and understanding this information. Ms. Ordonez requested clarification on changing enrollment trends. Dr. Morris reported that Crocker Farm and Wildwood remain consistent, and that Fort River has a declining enrollment while simultaneously experiencing an increase in poverty. Dr. Morris discussed that available analysis and exit information indicates that demographic shifts in enrollment have little to do with infrastructure. Mr. Nakajima suggested consideration for how different cohorts move through various physical spaces in town (i.e., a growing number of aging residents appear to be aging in place, rather than moving and opening up homes to potential families). Ms. Douangmany-Cage inquired about the placement of Marks Meadow students upon the closing of said school. Dr. Morris responded that most of Marks Meadow students were placed at Fort River. Mr. Shea provided a brief presentation on Crocker Farm, with emphasis on enrollment and space as well as specific advocacy for preschool and early education needs (relative to physical space). Mr. Shea welcomed the advancing of enrollment of preschool and early education, yet deferred to research on income achievement gap and the need for increased break out spaces. Dr. Morris reported that the district is currently working with the state regarding the Crocker Farm preschool currently beyond capacity with an active wait list, and having limited space. Dr. Morris spoke about the urgency of decisions regarding specialized program busing as well as redistricting. Mr. Nakajima summarized the need for school committee members to understand the roadmap, implications, and criteria for making such decisions. Dr. Morris recommended that the present focus be on criteria and desired outcome. Dr. Morris presented a conceptual option involving two enrollment zones while maintaining three schools. In said concept, Dr. Morris identified Fort River as an in-district school of choice (with dual language Spanish immersion); Crocker Farm and Wildwood as neighborhood schools with mirrored specialized programs (resulting in a decrease in special education busing needs). Dr. Morris cited research and shared ongoing and active collaborations with experts and colleagues as this concept has taken shape. Some of the highlighted benefits include: two enrollment zones result in improved income equity; the infrastructure at FR is enhanced by utilizing the outer classroom sections. Mr. Demling thanked Dr. Morris for his thought and research, requesting that this level of transparency be a model of fresh, out of the box creative thinking and an example of how to go through change in process. Ms. Douangmany-Cage expressed concern for students in specialized programs (Building Blocks) who may not be able to access the dual language program. Dr. Morris stated that the three district specialized programs are quite different from one another and that based on the specialized needs of a student, a dual language program may or may not be in the best interest of a student. Mr. Nakajima expressed reluctance to engage in a public conversation of this magnitude at present, however noted that additional such conceptual ideas are encouraged and could be fully vetted as to their ability to provide creative efforts to resolve current challenges. Ms. Hazzard identified the need for school committee to decide on the process and the time frame. Dr. Morris shared a sense of urgency along with need for process and community involvement, suggesting summer school committee meetings to explore viable solutions. Ms. Ordonez expressed concern for the likely diverse and great number of ideas that would be brought forward without a carefully crafted and well analyzed list of criteria. Ms. Ordonez suggested the district engage in discussion, research, and collaboration with other districts and school committee groups to learn of their histories and perspectives. Dr. Morris reported that he has been in communication with local experts along with additional experts throughout the field as well as other school districts. Mr. Ordonez suggested that a timeline, specific to enrollment and infrastructure needs, be established as soon as possible.

Infrastructure:

Dr. Morris presented the infrastructure needs as separate from the urgent enrollment challenges. Mr. Demling sought clarification and received confirmation from Dr. Morris that all of the *Assumptions in Scenarios* (see powerpoint presentation) are conservative and most likely are best case scenarios. Dr. Morris provided clarification on the *commissioning* process: Occurs when the building is being actively used; assesses whether or not the building matches the plans; is required by MSBA. Dr. Morris confirmed that the facts as presented have been thoroughly vetted and are as factual as present day information provides, and that the size of the school(s) for the various options presented remains consistent. Discussion and clarification regarding MSBA application eligibility: Ms. Douangmany-Cage reported that it is possible to have accelerated repair via MSBA simultaneous to MSBA new/renovation. Dr. Morris stated that MSBA does not allow two core projects to be done in parallel. Ms. Ordonez expressed concern for the impact on space and placement of students if renovations occurred simultaneously. Dr. Morris stated that the Finance Committee had not indicated being in favor or against the possibility of simultaneous renovations. Mr. Nakajima questioned the possibility of and advocacy for the cost of a Fort River feasibility study and a replacement boiler to come from Town Meeting. Marylou Theilman, Chair of the Town Finance Committee, encouraged Dr. Morris and the school committee to speak to the Town Manager regarding the possibility of appropriating funds in the Fall, to be accessed in phases. Dr. Morris requested that guidance from the school committee regarding Capital Requests be made in advance of the May 5 JCPC meeting. Ms. Hazzard reported that discussion at the most recent JCPC meeting centered on a \$700,000 feasibility study.

Final Comments:

Mr. Demling and Ms. Douangmany-Cage voiced their full support for a full feasibility study. Ms. Ordonez expressed concern in progressing with a feasibility study without being clear about intended use of the building. Dr. Morris clarified that the educational plan does not and could not take place for some time. Ms. Ordonez requests that a series of meetings take place in the short term. Mr. Nakajima stated that information from the feasibility study is needed in order to conclude aspects of the educational plan for the building. and suggested that explicit checkpoints be built into the process whereby various components and findings are reviewed and reassessed. Ms. Hazzard summarized the school committee discussion and directive for the district to move forward in requesting funds to complete the feasibility study with contingencies for natural checkpoints and revisions/reassessment throughout the process with acknowledgement that the full amount of requested funds are not utilized up front and may be interrupted for reason at any necessary checkpoint. Unanimous member decision (rather than a vote) to move forward with the request for funds to complete the feasibility study.

B. SuperKids Follow-Up

Dr. Morris summarized historical concerns regarding illustration changes to the characters of SuperKids and Superkids active response to and with district staff. Dr. Morris discussed examples and benefits of said collaborative process: highlighting awareness in curriculum areas outside of Superkids (i.e., art); acknowledgement that advocacy works; systemic analysis has resulted in serious and authentic dialogue which has in turn promoted positive changes in curriculum. Mr. Nakajima shared continued concern specific to the eye shape of characters Lily and Fritz. Ms. Douangmany-Cage stated that she is grateful for the process to date and expressed a desire for the opportunity to delve deeper and provide additional feedback.

C. FY17 Third Quarter Budget Update (moved ahead of Superkids update on the agenda)***DOCUMENT: Amherst Public School District FY17 Third Quarter Budget Update***

The Amherst Public Schools budget is on track to finish with a surplus after nine months of the year. Ms. Ordonez inquired about the figures (savings) associated with staff turnover. Mr. Mangano clarified that the positions were replaced, with less expensive teacher/staff. Mr. Demling inquired as to the amount of money which has been returned to the Town annually over the last several years. Mr. Mangano indicated an annual estimate of between zero and \$50,000 that is returned to the Town.

D. Policy Vote: Students--Protection of Undocumented Students

This item was tabled because the Regional School Committee has not yet approved the policy.

E. Superintendent's Evaluation Process***DOCUMENT: Superintendent's Performance Goals--Amherst; Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation Part III: Guide to Rubrics and Model Rubrics for Superintendent, Administrator and Teacher***

Ms. Hazzard cited a recent email sent to school committee members via Debbie Westmoreland, indicating that (at the School Committee retreat) members recommended that Superintendent goals be linked to the indicators and elements from the rubric (3C1, 3A2, 4C1). Plan: School Committee members to clarify the document at next meeting.

F. Accept Gifts

DOCUMENT: Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Jill Berry, District Treasurer, Dated April 20, 2017

Mr. Nakajima moved to accept \$100 from the Fort River Parent Council for an art gift and \$1,750 from the ARPS PGO Inc. DBA Wildwood PGO for the Wildwood Principal's discretion. The motion was seconded by Ms. Douangmany-Cage and passed with unanimous approval.

5. School Committee Planning

10:46p.m

Ms. Hazzard will request Monday May 8th from Town Meeting. Ms. Westmoreland will send a doodle poll to members regarding next meeting date.

6. Adjourn

10:47 p.m.

Mr. Nakajima moved to adjourn. Mr. Demling seconded. Motion to adjourn unanimously passed.

Respectfully Submitted,
Wendy Bloomenthal