

**Amherst School Committee Meeting
Wednesday, May 17, 2017
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

IN ATTENDANCE

Phoebe Hazzard	Mike Morris, Interim Superintendent
Peter Demling	Susan Wells, Wildwood Librarian
Anastasia Ordonez	Public and Press
Eric Nakajima	Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder
Vira Douangmany-Cage (participating remotely)	

1. Call to Order and Approve Minutes

6:04 p.m.

Ms. Hazzard called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m. and reviewed the agenda. Mr. Demling moved to approve the minutes from April 25, 2017. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was approved by roll call vote as follows: Demling—Aye; Hazzard--Aye; Nakajima--Aye; Ordonez--Aye; Douangmany-Cage--Abstaining. Mr. Nakajima moved to approve the minutes of May 1, 2017. Mr. Demling seconded and the motion was approved by roll call vote as follows: Demling--Aye; Hazzard--Aye; Nakajima--Aye; Ordonez--Aye; Douangmany-Cage--Abstaining

2. Announcements and Public Comment

6:08 p.m.

Ms. Hazzard stated that a response has been received from the Attorney General regarding an open meeting law complaint against the Regional School Committee. Since it is a Regional School Committee matter, it will not be addressed at tonight's meeting but will be on the agenda for the May 23 Regional School Committee meeting. Ms. Hazzard also noted that a number of people have expressed interest in having a process by which public comment can be made at times other than the beginning of the meetings. She said the committee will discuss this at a future meeting. Mr. Demling noted that public comment is guided by policy, so a change to it would go through the policy review process.

Toni Cunningham, parent, noted that she supports the effort to offer a survey to families who do not choose to attend the Amherst Schools. She expressed support for also establishing a standard process for surveying families who exit the district. Ms. Cunningham applauded Dr. Morris for his openness and honesty at recent post-building project presentations and encouraged School Committee members to host multiple, two-way discussion opportunities for families. Laura Draucker, community member, noted that the best approach to community engagement is to start with a diverse committee, begin with a very robust public engagement process that has been vetted by as many people as possible, have a written comment process that solicits comments that propose actual alternatives and are shared publicly. Maria Kopicki, community member, spoke about the need to have a broad, diverse building committee that has diverse voices at the table. She strongly encouraged the School Committee to record and broadcast all meetings of committee and subcommittee meetings as a way to ensure transparency. Judy Hamilton, Crocker Farm parent, spoke on behalf of the leadership team from Vote Yes. She stated that she is hopeful that lessons have been learned from the past process, noting that she hopes that the parents involved on the building committee have younger children since they will be the ones who use the school in the future. Ms. Hamilton noted that the School Committee is being asked to begin now addressing all of the enrollment issues that face the district since they cannot wait until the building process is complete. Vince O'Connor, community member, suggested that the School Committee consider allowing public comment during discussion of agenda items. He thanked the School Committee and the Superintendent for having an effective, well-thought out process for addressing bullying issues. Katherine Appy, former School Committee member, Town Meeting member and parent, spoke about the importance of separating the current enrollment issues from the building project, noting the inequities presented by these issues. She noted that the enrollment issues are in the School Committee's authority and encouraged them to address them with urgency. Janet McGowen, community member, urged the committee not to feel bound to the MSBA process, but to develop a public process that truly reaches out to the community so that people are heard.

3. New and Continuing Business

6:24 p.m.

A. Role and Membership of Fort River Feasibility Study Building Committee

Ms. Hazzard noted that the goal of tonight's discussion is to talk about what the school building committee's role is and what steps need to be taken as a committee to decide on the profile of committee members. Dr. Morris read the Town Meeting Article to remind the committee and audience of what Town Meeting charged the building committee to accomplish. He noted that there is no commitment to put a building up for a vote at the end of this process; rather the charge is to gather data for consideration by Town Meeting. Dr. Morris noted that comments from the previous building committee members had three consistent themes:

- A committee of 18 was too large to have meaningful, ongoing dialogue;
- There needed to be more publicly elected officials on the building committee, and
- The focus and commitment needs to be understood by all members before they join the committee.

Dr. Morris noted that he thinks the work of the building committee is about the possibilities of the Fort River site, not about grade configuration or the educational plan. Mr. Nakajima asked Dr. Morris to speak to whether the building committee would address the preschool issue and to speak more about the educational plan, Dr. Morris addressed the preschool issue, noting that the School Committee could give the school building committee a directive to look into that as part of their work. Dr. Morris noted that educational programs do have some impact on design, but it is mostly technical. Ms. Ordonez said that she has heard a desire from community members to be involved throughout the entire process. She noted that she thinks people are very concerned about the issue of grade configuration and the educational plan so she believes the two processes—the educational plan and the building committee/site assessment—need to happen simultaneously. She suggested finding a way to address the issue of educational planning, perhaps by having it as a standing agenda item. Dr. Morris agreed, noting again that there is no commitment from the town to actually build this building. The only commitment at this time is to fund researching the feasibility of the Fort River site. He said that there are known equity and enrollment challenges that must be addressed. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that her concern for the building committee is to bring those who have been on opposite sides together at the table with equal voices in a bipartisan process. Mr. Demling noted that his understanding has been that the building committee will develop a set of proposals for renovation or building that would be voted on by the School Committee for a recommendation to Town Meeting. Dr. Morris noted that there was not a vote at Town Meeting to bring this forward for a Town Meeting vote on approving a building, as is the case with an MSBA project. Mr. Nakajima noted that we want to find a project that staff, families and the community can be excited about and will want to move forward with. He said we need to come up with a variety of possible configurations for the building committee to ensure that the committee is functional and to find creative ways to engage those who cannot be on the committee. Dr. Morris noted that he heard the feedback regarding grade configuration and would not go down that road at this time. With regard to co-location, he does not think it would be financially practical for a fully town-funded school.

Discussion turned to the profile of the building committee. Ms. Ordonez said that she is wary of making the committee too large, noting that she would not go beyond the size of the last building committee. She expressed support for having representation from parents of older children who have gone through the school and noted that she sees the benefit of having a liaison from Town government. Mr. Demling noted that the community engagement will need to be much more robust if the committee is smaller. He suggested that members of the committee should be there not to express their personal opinion but to take in data and run the community engagement. Mr. Demling spoke about the possible ways of selecting members for the committee, noting the potential to have community input into the way in which selections are made. Ms. Douangmany Cage said that real effort needs to be made to ensure that people from some of the under-represented populations are involved. She suggested having the Family Center help with outreach. Mr. Nakajima noted that there were a lot of competencies on the last building committee that would logically be included on such a committee. He agreed that having a liaison with town government would be helpful. Mr. Nakajima noted that he believes that there will be people who very much want to be involved and engaged but cannot be on the committee. He said the School Committee has an obligation to ensure that people are well-engaged and meaningfully involved. Dr. Morris noted that he believes it is really important to have a representative from SEPAC, someone with knowledge about procurement, and someone from the Facilities staff. Ms. Ordonez requested a list of the previous building committee members with their competencies well in advance of the next meeting so it can be shared publicly and can inform the discussion of the new committee membership. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that there may be opportunity here to put the participatory action research policy into play. Mr. Demling suggested being Fort River-centrist since it is a Fort River feasibility study. Dr. Morris noted that it is important to ensure that the committee make-up is not just people who are directly connected to the schools. He noted that it is a town-wide project, not just a school project. Mr. Nakajima suggested the possibility of creating an empowered group, in addition to the building committee, that would meet regularly and serve as a dialogue, feedback and responsiveness group. It was agreed that Dr. Morris will meet with the Chair and Vice-Chair to develop a draft document to inform the discussion at the next meeting.

B. Arts Integration Update with Susan Wells

This item was moved up on the agenda in the interest of time for Ms. Wells. Dr. Morris introduced Susan Wells, Wildwood librarian and media specialist, noting the innovative arts integration work that happens at Wildwood under her direction. Ms. Wells provided data about the library, noting that they check out about 3,000 books per week. She then utilized the Wildwood library website to review integration projects that are being done as a team with the librarian, the art teacher

and classroom teachers. Ms. Wells invited members of the School Committee to visit one of the Wildwood makerspace activities that take place on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Ms. Hazzard thanked Ms. Wells for coming to make the presentation.

C. Charter/Private/Choice Family Survey

DOCUMENT: *The Amherst-Regional Public Schools Survey of Families Choosing Private Schools; The Amherst-Regional Public Schools Survey of Families Choosing Charter Schools; The Amherst-Regional Public Schools Survey of Families Choosing Choice Schools*

Dr. Morris noted that the surveys have been drafted as a way to solicit feedback from families who choose to attend a school other than the Amherst schools. He explained that the surveys will be sent to families with a self-addressed, stamped envelope and will also include a link to take the survey via Survey Monkey or a QR code. He asked School Committee members to share any feedback on the surveys, noting that they can email comments if they need additional time to review the documents. Dr. Morris noted that the goal is to have the surveys sent out by June 1. Ms. Ordonez suggested including a question about students with special needs unless it was deliberately left out. Dr. Morris said he will craft a question about special needs students. Mr. Demling said that sending an advance letter noting that a survey is coming can generate responses, and sending the survey twice is a good idea. He asked if this survey is geared toward marketing our schools. Dr. Morris explained that we want to understand why people are making the choices they are, and if themes emerge, we need to address them whether they are perception issues or realities of the district. Mr. Nakajima said he believes this survey should be done regularly. He suggested changing “physical infrastructure” in question 12 to “facilities.” Ms. Ordonez noted that she has heard a lot of misinformation around the issue of charter schools and students leaving the district. She suggested making it clear in the initial letter that goes out that we are not in a panic state about the number of students leaving the district, rather, it is important to have data and to use it to change any concerns that can be addressed.

D. Feedback from Initial Post-Building Project Engagement

Dr. Morris reported that the PGOs helped organize post-building project engagement meetings at all three schools to gather feedback, and staff meetings were also held at all three schools. A forum will be scheduled specifically for families with special needs students, and the post-building project presentation will be made at Town Meeting on a date to be scheduled. Dr. Morris noted that there were a number of people at the meetings who had not been at meetings for the building project so a broader group is being engaged. With regard to addressing the enrollment issues, Dr. Morris noted that redistricting for 2018-2019 is too soon to do the process well. He said the fall of 2019 is the earliest he would recommend and suggested that a working group could be put together to begin work this summer. Dr. Morris noted that such a working group would visit other schools, research options and report to the School Committee about their work each month over a course of eight months or so. Mr. Demling suggested asking the Principals to seek feedback from their staff members to be shared with the Superintendent and School Committee to address working conditions. He asked Dr. Morris to speak to what he sees the charge of the group to be. Dr. Morris said it would be studying, in-depth, as many ideas to address enrollment issues as is feasible. Mr. Nakajima noted that, as a process matter, we would want to determine how we would set priorities on which to focus. Ms. Ordonez noted that she likes the idea of developing several different options to consider and decide upon. Mr. Demling noted that he looks at this as a constraint-based problem due to the schedule. He said there is not enough time for a master plan, but he supports looking at as many creative ideas as possible given the time constraints. Dr. Morris noted that, if done well, he does not think eight months to come up with a menu of options is rushed. Discussion continued regarding the way in which priorities for focus will be set by the full committee. Dr. Morris noted that he does feel some urgency to get started on the enrollment issues.

E. School Committee Communication with the Public

Ms. Hazzard said that she would like to explore ways to keep the public regularly updated on what is happening and what is coming up on future agendas. Ideas she suggested are having “office hours,” farmer's market outreach, working with *The Gazette* to have a regular column written by one or two members, or having a small item in the ARPS Updates. Ms. Ordonez said that having a regular voice in *The Gazette* would be good place to start because of the nature of that media. She noted that making the schools’ issues more visible in a regular way, to a broad swath of the community, is important. Mr. Nakajima volunteered to reach out to the editor of *The Gazette* about this possibility. Ms. Douangmany Cage suggested revising the Amherst Media show about the schools. Dr. Morris offered to support outreach about this possibility with Amherst Media. Ms. Ordonez suggested that the first topic for the article in *The Gazette* should be about seeking community feedback on the issues discussed tonight. Mr. Nakajima suggested that Dr. Morris could do short segment videos for Amherst Media on the topics on which public feedback is needed.

F. Interim Superintendent Evaluation Instrument

DOCUMENT: End-of-Cycle Summative Evaluation Report--Amherst

Ms. Hazzard noted that the evaluation instrument presented tonight was revised with input from Dorothy Presser of MASC. Ms. Ordonez suggested adding something about diversity under indicator II-B. Ms. Ordonez then moved to approve the end-of-cycle summative evaluation instrument, and Mr. Demling seconded. Dr. Morris noted that the committee will receive a document from him tomorrow that includes links to artifacts that inform the elements and his goals. After discussion, Ms. Ordonez moved to amend her initial motion to amend indicator IIB to read "Implements a cohesive approach to recruitment, hiring, induction, development, and career growth that promotes *diversity, as well as* high-quality and effective practice." Mr. Demling seconded and, after brief discussion, the amendment was unanimously approved by roll call vote. The original amended motion was then approved unanimously by roll call vote. There was discussion of the methodology to use for the survey, with Dr. Morris explaining that Survey Monkey can be set to allow respondents to go in more than once to work on the survey. A pdf copy of the respondent's submission can be emailed to them by Ms. Westmoreland. The consensus of the committee was to use Survey Monkey as the collection tool.

5. Interim Superintendent's Update

9:25 p.m.

DOCUMENT: Interim Superintendent's Update to the Amherst School Committee dated May 17, 2017

Dr. Morris distributed his written update and briefly spoke about:

- The Black Scholars Rising event last week;
- The Bias-Based Incidents Conference he and five other staff members attended on May 10;
- The Special Education Survey that is currently being conducted with families and staff;
- The Furthering Diversity Conference coming up on June 1;
- The upcoming end-of-year events and activities, including graduation;
- The upcoming joint study between the Town of Amherst and UMass regarding students in tax-exempt housing; and
- An update on final lead water repairs at Wildwood and Fort River.

6. Further Business

9:30 p.m.

A. Clerical/Media Award

DOCUMENT: Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Debbie Westmoreland, Assistant to the Superintendent re: Clerical/Media Awards dated May 12, 2017

Mr. Nakajima moved that, in accordance with the Unit B employee contract, the Amherst School Committee approves clerical/media merit awards in the amount of \$500 each for Heather Poirier and Georgia Malcolm. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

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

DOCUMENT: Policy III Students--Protection of Undocumented Students

Ms. Ordonez moved to approve the policy Student--Protection of Undocumented Students. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

F. Accept Gifts

DOCUMENT: Memos to the Amherst School Committee from Jill Berry, District Treasurer, Dated March 3, 2017 and May 9, 2017; Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Debbie Westmoreland, Assistant to the Superintendent, re: Donations to Students for the Summer Program, dated May 12, 2017

Mr. Demling moved to accept any and all donations of supplies and monetary gifts in support of student needs to allow full participation in summer programs for the summer of 2017. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote. Dr. Morris acknowledged the work of AEF and thanked them for the grants they are providing for teachers. He briefly explained what the Champions Course and Torch Bearers Project grants support. Mr. Nakajima moved to accept \$5,200 from the Amherst Education Foundation for the Champions Course and Torch Bearers Project. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote. Mr. Demling expressed his gratitude for the incredible work of AEF and noted that he would love to have them come to a future meeting to talk about their work and their grant program. Ms. Ordonez moved to accept \$500 from Big Y for Crocker Farm at the Principal's discretion and \$500 from Big Y for Fort River at the Principal's discretion. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

7. School Committee Planning

9:42 p.m.

Ms. Westmoreland will do a Doodle poll for week of June 12 and June 5 for an additional Amherst School Committee meeting. Mr. Demling suggested having someone from MASC and Representative Goldstein come to a meeting to talk about the foundation budget and advocacy. Mr. Nakajima and Ms. Ordonez expressed their support for this.

8. Adjourn

9:46 p.m.

Mr. Nakajima moved to adjourn at 9:46 p.m. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland