

**Amherst School Committee Meeting
Tuesday, September 6, 2016
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

IN ATTENDANCE

Katherine Appy, Chair
Phoebe Hazzard
Anastasia Ordonez
Laura Kent
Vira Douangmany-Cage

Mike Morris, Acting Superintendent
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Nick Yaffe, Wildwood
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Jean Fay, APEA President
Chris Eggemeier, Wildwood Sixth Grade Teacher
Jennifer Smith, Crocker Farm Teacher
Michelle Regan-Ladd, Crocker Farm Teacher
Derek Shea, Crocker Farm Principal
Sharri Conklin, Crocker Farm Assistant Principal
Diane Chamberlain, Fort River Principal
Public and Press
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

1. Call to Order and Approve Minutes 6:03 p.m.

Ms. Appy called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. and reviewed the agenda. Ms. Hazzard then moved to approve the minutes of June 21, 2016. Ms. Kent seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Announcements and Public Comment 6:04 p.m.

Kathleen Anderson, NAACP President, stated that the NAACP has received a letter of concern about a racist reading curriculum, *SuperKids*, that is being used in the schools in second grade. She noted that the request is that the School Committee use their authority to rescind this curriculum and put one in place that will reflect the colors of students in our district. Ms. Kent noted that this topic will be addressed later in the meeting.

3. Acting Superintendent's Update 6:05 p.m.

Dr. Morris reported on a number of events and activities including Project Backpack, convocation, the First Day on the Common celebration and the opening of school. He provided an update regarding the lead water testing that has been completed at Crocker Farm, Wildwood and Fort River and is scheduled for all of the other schools. Ms. Appy asked if the fixtures that tested high for lead at Crocker Farm were in the old part of the building. Dr. Morris explained that one was in the new part of the building and the solder in the fixtures is believed to be the problem. Ms. Ordonez asked when the water was last tested at Crocker Farm, and Mr. Morris confirmed it was in 2008. He noted that tests are done on a regular basis at the schools but in a much less intensive way. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked what will happen since students cannot drink from the fixtures that tested high. Dr. Morris noted that those fixtures have been shut off, and the district has purchased reusable water bottles for the students in the affected areas. Ms. Hazzard thanked Dr. Morris for keeping the community update with clear, accurate information about the lead issue. Dr. Morris then provided background information regarding the Superkids curriculum Ms. Anderson addressed in her public comments, noting that the issues with how characters are depicted begins with the second grade curriculum. He explained that the decision about whether to continue using Superkids or change to the Foundations reading curriculum was made at each school based on teacher input. Mr. Morris is planning to write another letter of concern to the publisher and will bring it to the School Committee to see if they wish to sign it with him. Ms. Ordonez noted that she saw the second grade materials after hearing these concerns, and she can see the issues. She noted that we may want to more strongly consider dropping Superkids if the publisher does not adequately address them. Mr. Morris noted that if the 2017 edition is not significantly better, he agrees. Ms. Appy asked Mr. Morris to share his letter to the publisher with the School Committee prior to the next meeting so they can discuss it. Ms. Douangmany Cage noted that sometimes textbook characters limit our students, particularly with regard to the progress we have experienced in our district around gender identity. Mr. Morris agreed, noting that he would add disability and adoptive families to that. Ms. Appy noted that this will be a topic at the next meeting.

A. FY16 Fourth Quarter Budget Update**DOCUMENT: Amherst Public Schools FY2016 Final Budget Report**

Mr. Mangano briefly reviewed the highlights of the final FY16 budget report, noting that the year ended \$15,770 under budget. These funds will be returned to the Town of Amherst general fund. Mr. Mangano answered brief clarifying questions for the committee.

B. Amherst School Building Project Update**I. 6th Grade Model**

Mr. Eggemeyer reported on the work of the sixth grade visioning team through which all of the sixth grade teachers came together to discuss the sixth grade wing and what model could be fulfilled in the new school. He noted that sixth grade is a very big bridge year, and there was discussion around having a one-to-one connection between each student and an adult in the new school. The team also talked about including mindfulness social/emotional programs, restorative practices and taking advantage of the resources available in the Five Colleges area. Mr. Eggemeyer said that students taking ownership of their learning was a strong consideration of the discussions. Mr. Morris noted that there was a great deal of collaboration in bringing all of the sixth grade teachers together for this work. Mr. Eggemeyer noted that the sixth grade teachers are very excited about being in the same corridor since it will greatly enhance their collaboration. Ms. Hazzard asked if science labs are part of the design. Mr. Eggemeyer noted that the teachers did talk to the architects about their desire to have science labs in the new building.

II. Early Childhood Model**DOCUMENT: Crocker Farm Visioning Group—Dr. Tina Mannarino, LEARN**

Mr. Morris briefly reviewed the highlights of the report produced by the Crocker Farm Visioning Project, which took place over four meetings and included teachers, administrators and community members led by a facilitator. The focus was on how to prepare for Crocker Farm becoming a Pre-K to grade one school. The group looked at the areas of effective classroom strategies, teachers and teaching, family engagement strategies, the learning environment, instructional tools, strategic administrator effectiveness, and continuity and pathways. Ms. Appy asked if this exploratory group will continue working in the future. Mr. Morris noted that the plan is for the group to meet during the year, and some members of the group are taking a field trip with him in two weeks to an early childhood model school in Connecticut. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked where the funding would come from for a Pre-K to grade one school since the state will not reimburse for it. Mr. Morris noted that there will be operational savings of approximately \$400,000 per year, and he would recommend spending approximately \$200,000 for the preschool. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked if the operational savings should be used toward paying down the debt of an override. Mr. Morris noted that the town could do so; however, towns do not typically take funds from the operational budget for such uses. Ms. Appy concurred, noting that capital funds would be used rather than operational funds.

III. Financial Update

Mr. Morris noted that all of the information currently available still indicates that the district will receive approximately \$34 to \$35 from MSBA grant funds, and the town will be responsible for \$32 to \$33 million. He will share information with the School Committee as more details become available.

IV. Transition Year of 2020-2021

Mr. Morris asked for the School Committee's support to survey parents about whether this year's Crocker Farm second grade class, which would be in sixth grade in 2020, should stay at Crocker Farm for their sixth grade year instead of moving to the new building for just one year before transitioning to the Middle School. Ms. Ordonez suggested having a dialogue group or other forum to discuss the issue in tandem with the survey. Mr. Morris noted that the goal at this time, four years out, is to get a sense of whether it is even an option worth exploring. After discussion, Mr. Morris suggested framing the survey by letting parents know that is the goal. Ms. Douangmany Cage acknowledged that there is a group of community members who do not want to move forward with a change in the grade configuration and asked if surveys should be done to see if people support even moving forward with the grade 2-6 configuration. Mr. Morris noted that we will have a better sense in November

after the election regarding how the community feels about that. His intention with the survey he is suggesting is to get feedback on the teaching and learning component of student transitions.

C. Accept Gifts

Ms. Kent moved to accept \$500 from the ARPS PGO #237 for Crocker Farm at the Principal's discretion. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Ms. Hazzard noted that she will be happy to write thank you notes for the gifts accepted by the Amherst School Committee.

5. Adjourn

7:09 p.m.

Ms. Kent moved to adjourn at 7:09 p.m. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland