

**Amherst School Committee Meeting**  
**Tuesday, November 21, 2017**  
**Library, Amherst Regional High School**  
**21 Mattoon Street**  
**Amherst, MA 01002**

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Phoebe Hazzard, Chair	Michael Morris, Superintendent
Eric Nakajima	Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Vira Douangmany Cage	Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder
Anastasia Ordonez	
Peter Demling	

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

Ms. Hazzard called the Amherst School Committee to order at 6:03 p.m. She announced that the meeting is recorded and live broadcast by Amherst Media. Ms. Ordonez moved to approve the minutes of October 17 and November 14, 2017. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**2. Announcements and Public Comments** **6:06 p.m.**

Ms. Hazzard noted that she and Mr. Demling are willing to serve on the Budget Coordinating Committee.

**3. Superintendent's Update** **6:07 p.m.**

Dr. Morris reported the following:

- The regionalization study grant was submitted last week;
- Dr. Morris and Ms. Cunningham are doing listening sessions at each of the schools, and he will be able to share a synopsis of what he hears from elementary staff in January; and
- Each of the PGOs have facilitated meetings where Dr. Morris and Mr. Sheehan were able to gather feedback regarding the homework policy draft.

**4. New and Continuing Business** **6:09 p.m.**

**A. FY19 Budget Guidance**

Mr. Mangano presented the key budget indicators, which are the variables that will have the most impact on the budget. Key points for the Amherst budget include staff turnover savings, which have helped preserve programming; the outlook for health insurance, which is expected to get worse; operational costs like transportation, utilities and Central Office, which have been stable or declining; and strong in-district programming in both special and general education, which have led to low out-of-district and school choice costs. Favorable trends in the district include wages and benefits, health insurance (although the future outlook is less favorable), choice tuition, and utilities. Unfavorable trends include retiree costs and charter tuition. Mr. Mangano answered clarifying questions for the committee throughout the presentation. He noted that other concerns include declining enrollments and reserve levels, although reserves are pretty healthy at this time. Mr. Nakajima asked what areas particularly concern Mr. Mangano about the budget picture for Amherst. Mr. Mangano noted that rising health insurance costs are something that must be monitored closely. Dr. Morris noted that we may need to change our structure to some degree to meet early childhood needs.

**B. FY18 First Quarter Budget Update**

Mr. Mangano briefly reviewed the highlights of the FY18 First Quarter Budget Update. He noted that there is only one major concern at this time, which is that payroll is projected to be over budget by \$101,700 due to increased ELL staffing at Crocker Farm and Wildwood; increased general and special educator paraeducator support; an additional classroom teacher at Fort River and administrative reductions and staff turnover. He noted that the overall budget is on-track at this early point in the fiscal year. Ms. Hazzard noted that ELL seems to be a major factor. Dr. Morris noted that an in-depth ELL update will be presented to the School Committee early in 2018.

**C. FY18 Budget Adjustments Based on Health Insurance Increase**

Mr. Mangano explained that \$152,717 is needed to cover the increase in health insurance, \$26,677 is needed to cover unanticipated payroll increases, and \$500 is needed to cover PD stipends for FY18. He then explained the plan to

cover these expenses. Part of the plan is to make a 10% across-the-board cut in supplies, and Mr. Mangano reviewed the amount that will be reduced in each school, program and department. The other part of the plan is to utilize up to an additional \$75,000 from the school choice reserves. Mr. Mangano noted that, even with the use of the additional funds, the choice reserves are healthy. Mr. Demling moved to approve budget transfers between cost centers as presented. Mr. Nakajima seconded and, after clarifying questions about the cuts, the motion was unanimously approved. Mr. Nakajima moved to authorize up to \$75,000 in additional school choice expenditures for FY18, Mr. Demling seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

#### **D. Charter School Expansion Letter**

Ms. Hazzard noted that this is the second time the committee has seen and discussed this draft letter, and she then opened the floor for discussion. Mr. Demling expressed his thanks to Ms. Hazzard and Mr. Nakajima for their work in updating his draft of the letter. He then reviewed formatting changes he made to their draft, which had been emailed to the full committee yesterday. Mr. Demling suggested striking the word "also" from the sentence that begins "These charts also show..." and noted one typographical error. Ms. Ordonez moved to approve the letter with Mr. Demling's corrections and discussion followed. Ms. Douangmany Cage asked if the data for Asian students can be disaggregated by subgroups within that population. Mr. Demling explained that the data is from DESE, and they only report on the overall group defined as Asian. Discussion followed regarding ways to edit the sentence referencing these subgroups, which is the first sentence in paragraph four, and edits were agreed upon. Dr. Morris noted that Representative Kulick should be cut from the cc list since this is not a Regional letter. Ms. Ordonez noted that a reference should be made in the letter to the article passed by Town Meeting regarding charter school funding. After discussion, it was agreed that the reference will be placed at the end of the second to last paragraph. Mr. Demling suggested an edit to sentence four of the second paragraph on page three. Mr. Nakajima moved to amend the motion to substitute "the committee's edits" for Mr. Demling's edits. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. The original motion, as amended, was then unanimously approved.

#### **E. Policy BEAA: Superintendency Union 26 First Reading**

Ms. Hazzard noted that the goal of this policy is to have an official policy on the books regarding Superintendency Union 26. Discussion followed regarding the wording of the policy, particularly the second paragraph that discusses the Superintendency Union as the agent of the town. Mr. Nakajima suggested that the paragraph should reference MGL 71:61. It was agreed that the Policy Subcommittee will review the policy again. Ms. Hazzard noted that the Pelham School Committee will be having a first read at their next meeting.

#### **F. Building Project Update**

Mr. Nakajima reported that it took some time to find an agreeable time for the first meeting, which is November 30 at 4:00 p.m. in the PD Center at the middle school. He noted that Dr. Morris will facilitate the meeting until a Chair is elected, and the first meeting will include a procurement presentation by Claire McGinnis and Anthony Delaney, the Town's procurement officer, as well as a discussion of communication and community engagement. Mr. Nakajima noted that Maria Kopicki, who is a member of the building committee, has arranged for three people to be trained by Amherst Media to tape the meetings for Amherst Media to show at a later date. Ms. Ordonez noted that future updates on this work should be listed on the agenda as "Fort River Feasibility Study" rather than "Building Project Update" to avoid any confusion on the part of the public.

#### **G. Enrollment Working Group Update**

Dr. Morris reported that the group is meeting next Wednesday, November 29. He reviewed the focus of each of the five working groups, noting that each of the groups will be presenting their findings to the School Committee. Ms. Hazzard reported on the work of the Dual Language Working Group, on which she serves. She noted that the group conducted a survey of Pre-K through grade six families to gather information about the level of interest in a dual-language or other type of magnet school. There was brief discussion of the term "magnet school" and its meaning. Mr. Nakajima suggested changing the terminology to better reflect that the school would be a thematic public school.

#### **H. MASC Conference Follow-Up**

Ms. Ordonez reported on her attendance at the joint MASC/MASS conference, which she was able to attend for two of the four days. She noted that one issue that came up was poverty in Massachusetts, which is rapidly increasing. Ms. Ordonez noted that our preconceptions around poverty may not match the experience of our students and families, and there are steps that can be taken at a policy level to help mitigate poverty, particularly at the preschool level. She suggested that it would be beneficial to collaborate with preschool programs throughout the community. Ms.

Ordonez noted that the biggest takeaway regarding the issue of poverty, for her, was that we cannot support the children without supporting the families. She encouraged strengthening the links with agencies that provide this type of support, as well as having training of staff around the reality of poverty now versus the perceptions of poverty. Ms. Ordonez reported that the opioid epidemic was the second issue that was discussed at the conference. She noted the impact of the epidemic on young children who may be living with the stress of addiction in the family. Ms. Ordonez noted that she would like to find room on the agendas over the next few months to have more in-depth discussions about these issues.

#### **I. RSDPC School Committee Member Recommendation**

Ms. Hazzard noted that Mr. Demling has expressed his willingness to serve on this committee. She passed his name on to the Town Moderator so he can be appointed.

#### **J. Accept Gifts**

Mr. Nakajima moved to accept \$3,200 from the Wildwood PGO for use at the principal's discretion; \$20 from Martha Olver for use at the Crocker Farm Principal's Discretion; and \$55 from Lucia Spiro for use at the Crocker Farm Principal's Discretion. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

#### **5. Adjourn**

**8:34 p.m.**

Mr. Demling moved to adjourn at 8:34 p.m. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Debbie Westmoreland

#### **MEETING DOCUMENTS**

1. *Amherst School Committee Minutes of October 17, 2017*
2. *Amherst School Committee Minutes of November 14, 2017*
3. *Amherst Public Schools FY19 Budget Guidance Key Indicators*
4. *Amherst Public Schools Fiscal Year 2018 First Quarter Budget Report*
5. *Amherst Public Schools Budget Transfers Between Cost Centers, November 16, 2017*
6. *Amherst Public Schools Fiscal Year 2018 November 16, 2017 Payroll and Expense Accounts Report*
7. *Revolving Funds School Choice*
8. *Letter from the School Committee to Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education dated November 17, 2017*
9. *Policy BEAA: School Committee: Superintendency Union #26 School Committee*
10. *Memo to the Amherst School Committee from Jill Berry, District Treasurer, dated November 14, 2017*

*Approved December 19, 2017*