

**JOINT Meeting of the Amherst, Pelham and Regional School Committees**  
**Tuesday, August 30, 2011**  
**Town Room, Amherst Town Hall**

**In attendance:**

Rick Hood, Chair	Maria Geryk, Superintendent of Schools
Kip Fonsh	Rob Detweiler, Director of Finance & Operations
Kathy Weilerstein	Kathy Mazur, Human Resources Director
Kristen Luschen	Beth Graham, Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Rob Spence	Marta Guevara, Director of Achievement and Accountability
Irv Rhodes	Jerry Champagne, Director of Information Systems
Katherine Appy	Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
Debbie Gould	Mike Hayes, ARMS Principal
Steve Rivkin (arrived at 7:03 p.m.)	Mike Morris, CF Principal
Annemarie Foley (Pelham SC)	Monica Colley, FR Principal
	Kim Stender, Volunteer Coordinator
	Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

**1. Welcome**

**7:00 p.m.**

**A. & B. Call to Order and Agenda Review**—Mr. Hood called the Regional School Committee meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Rhodes then called the Amherst School Committee to order and Ms. Weilerstein called the Pelham School Committee to order. Mr. Hood turned the meeting over to Ms. Geryk to reorganize the officers of the Regional School Committee as required after all of the member towns have held elections and appointed Regional representatives. Ms. Geryk asked for nominations for Regional School Committee Chair. Mr. Rhodes nominated Rick Hood and Ms. Gould seconded the nomination. Mr. Hood was appointed by unanimous roll call vote. Mr. Hood then asked for nominations for Vice-Chair. Ms. Gould nominated Ms. Appy as Vice-Chair and Mr. Rhodes seconded. Ms. Appy was appointed by unanimous roll call vote.

**C. Approve Minutes**—Mr. Fonsh made a motion to approve the minutes of June 14, 2011 as presented. Mr. Rhodes seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**2. Announcements and Public Comments**

**7:04 p.m.**

Michael Aaronson, parent and taxpayer, read a prepared statement regarding an email he was forwarded from Rick Hood, Regional School Committee Chair, stating that it is less expensive to hire an outside attorney rather than to use the firm the School Committee hired to represent the district in all special education cases. Mr. Aaronson stated that the negligence of Mr. Hood and the administrator who made the decision to hire a different attorney is hurting the district's children (Mr. Aaronson's full comments are attached). Mr. Rivkin stated that he would like to know more about this decision and asked how we can have a retainer agreement with a law firm for special education cases and choose not to use that firm. Ms. Geryk noted that she will not address the issue in open session because it involves specific students and she is concerned about confidentiality issues. Ms. Luschen stated that it was clear in discussions during the time a new law firm was being considered that any cases that were already in process when the new firm was hired would remain with the previous firm. Mr. Hood noted that condition would include any cases that were reopened at a later date.

**3. Superintendent's Update**

**7:13 p.m.**

**DOCUMENT: Amherst School District Enrollments (updated August 30, 2011)**

Ms. Geryk re-extended invitations to the School Committee to the First Day event scheduled from 5:30-7:00 on the Amherst Town Common on September 1 and to the district convocation for staff at 8:00 a.m. on September 2. She reported briefly on the Backpack Project and Safe Seats for Kids distribution that begins on September 1 and showed a copy of the districts' new Crisis Response Procedures flip chart that will be in every classroom. Ms. Geryk distributed and reviewed an updated district enrollment chart for the Amherst elementary schools. Mr. Rivkin noted that having 23 students in the Wildwood second grade is less than desirable and asked if anything can be done about it. Ms. Geryk noted that she has been talking with

principals about this issue regularly. They are comfortable with the current class size projections, but they will continue to monitor them and adjustments will be made if necessary.

#### **4. New and Continuing Business**

**7:18 p.m.**

**DOCUMENTS: Copy of Powerpoint slide presentation for SC (projector was not working); 2011-2012 District Improvement Plan (color-coded for School Committee goals); School Committee Goals 2011-2012; 2010-2011 District Improvement Plan Progress Report; Proposed Regulations on Evaluation of Educators 603 CMR 35.00; School Committee Evaluation of the Superintendent 2011-2012 (blank form); and Evaluation Standards**

**A. 2011-2012 District Improvement Plan**—Ms. Geryk briefly reviewed the 2011-2012 District Improvement Plan (DIP), and Mr. Hood opened the floor for School Committee questions. Mr. Spence asked what the term “guaranteed curriculum” means in the document. Ms. Geryk explained that it means the district has methods to sample what is happening in the classroom and teachers develop a collective commitment to what will be taught and when. Mr. Rivkin stated that this is an elegant plan, but a completely opposite plan could also be used. He asked if two teachers who teach very successfully, but in completely different ways, will be asked to change their methodology. Ms. Geryk said she would want to see data showing they are both being successful in reaching all students. Ms. Weilerstein asked why there are still interim directors listed on the organization chart and what the plan is for these positions. Ms. Geryk explained that JoAnn Smith has been kept as Interim because her position, which used to be held by Ms. Geryk, will have to be posted in order to hire a permanent replacement. The plan is to post the position in the spring, and Ms. Smith can apply. Mr. Rivkin asked for clarification of whether Ms. Guevara’s position is new. Ms. Geryk explained that it is simply an internal reorganization, not a new position. Mr. Spence asked for clarification of the 2.0 FTE listed on the organizational chart for the Director of Curriculum and Instruction; Ms. Geryk stated that she is actively working with Amherst College to help fund a second director, as discussed with the School Committee last year. The position will be funded through a gift from Amherst College and grant funds. Mr. Rivkin stated that he is disappointed that math was not included on the agenda as a separate item since he requested at the Amherst meeting. He stated that the district is implementing a professional development plan that costs roughly \$400,000 a year because it involves pulling out six teachers to be coaches. Mr. Rivkin expressed his belief that the program needs to be vigorously evaluated to see if it is effective and asked what the plan is to ensure kids get very good instruction. Ms. Geryk said we will be evaluating the coaching model both internally and externally, and one of the goals within the DIP is to evaluate the program and the effectiveness of staff in terms of their teaching. Ms. Gould said she is struggling with how the effectiveness of these programs will be measured and asked what Ms. Geryk has in mind for evaluating what is working. Ms. Geryk said everything should be evaluating in terms of improvement in student scores, individually and by groups of students. Ms. Weilerstein stated that we need to have baseline data that can be used for comparison in the future, and Ms. Geryk noted that Ms. Guevara is looking at past and current data that will be used to evaluate where we are and where we hope to be. Mr. Rhodes noted that he had the privilege of sitting in on a class observation in another district recently, and the principal’s feedback to the teacher was targeted, specific and actionable. Ms. Luschen said she would like to see action plan updates more often than once per year. Ms. Geryk said she would be happy to provide regular updates for the School Committee. Ms. Graham spoke regarding the professional development offered this summer, noting that between 90 and 100 teachers voluntarily participated in mathematics content professional development. She reported that plans are in place for the fall for grade level team, content-specific professional development. Ms. Weilerstein suggested that it would be beneficial for families and other teachers to know which teachers have received this training so they can access their knowledge. Ms. Luschen asked when the universal screening will be completed across all schools. Mr. Morris explained the timeline that has been followed to date and what is in place for the upcoming year. Mr. Hayes provided the same information for the Middle School. Ms. Gould stated that we had a positive discussion in the spring regarding race and the need to investigate and put in place strategies to deal with long-standing issues. Ms. Geryk stated that Ms. Guevara has begun this work with the Equity Group, which made specific suggestions for steps that will lead to improvements. Ms. Guevara is developing Action Plans for the district that will be attached to the district goals. Mr. Rhodes noted that the district is committed to using the DART analysis from DESE as we move forward with our work.

**B. 2010-2011 District Improvement Plan Progress Report**—Ms. Geryk briefly reviewed highlights of the 2010-2011 District Improvement Plan Progress Report. Ms. Weilerstein stated it would be beneficial to gather data about who we are reaching through Amherst Media programs and other outreach efforts, as well as on the work of the ombudsperson. Ms. Gould thanked Ms. Geryk for putting together the progress report, noting that it shows that a lot of good work has been happening. She asked for more information about the note that “two of three team members for the outside review have been identified” for the K-12 Science Review. Ms. Graham explained that outside consultants will be reviewing the program, and it is likely that the final team will include only two members. Ms. Appy noted that she particularly likes having supporting documents available as active links in the main progress report. Mr. Fonsh asked how children are selected for participation in the Center for New Americans program and how long the program will be grant funded. Ms. Geryk explained that when parents go to the Center for adult language training, their children receive educational services from a certified preschool teacher. With regard to funding, she explained that 2010-2011 was the first year of a three-year grant. Mr. Rhodes noted that there was considerable discussion last year about teacher perception and race, and it would be a great goal of the district to address this head-on in meaningful ways. On that topic, Mr. Jackson reported that in the final version of the film for teachers he reported on last spring, the MSAN students’ comments were narrowed down to two issues: 1) how it feels to live in a building day-to-day in which they are a statistical minority and 2) expectations of them and how they feel about those expectations. New teachers viewed the film today, and it will be available to experienced teachers when they return on Friday. Mr. Rivkin expressed concern that test evidence shows that the type of math curriculum we are using at the elementary is not effective for disadvantaged students. He also expressed disappointment that an evaluation of IMP was not done, noting that he is concerned because there is a movement to make IMP the sole math curriculum at the high school. Mr. Jackson stated that he was a Middle School principal prior to coming to ARHS. He said that using IMP (Connected Math) raised his middle school students’ test scores significantly, and he found it to be the best thing they ever did for their students. Mr. Jackson stated that IMP has been vigorously vetted by NCTM and has been named one of the top five math curriculum programs. Mr. Rivkin stated that he misspoke and meant that we had an opportunity to do an evaluation of the two high school math programs and he is disappointed that we did not. Ms. Gould asked if Mr. Rivkin’s statement that there is a movement to make IMP the only program at ARHS is accurate. Mr. Jackson noted that he has never stated, either verbally or in writing, anything about where the ARHS math program should be in five years. Mr. Rivkin left the meeting at the end of this discussion.

**C. Superintendent Evaluation**—Mr. Hood explained how the evaluation form was developed. He suggested that the evaluation discussion begin in December and that the School Committee members have the forms completed and submitted by January for the February evaluation. Ms. Weilerstein noted that the form seems conducive to serving as a live document on which each School Committee member can make notes and track progress as things are presented throughout the year. Ms. Geryk said she also intends to present the School Committee with a self-assessment before they have to begin their evaluation. Mr. Hood asked the School Committee members to weigh in on whether to ask for input from partners, staff and others to inform the evaluation. Ms. Gould noted that she believes it would be valuable, but a different form should be used for non-school committee members. Ms. Luschen asked that we check with the attorney regarding whether all input received will be a public document under the new law. Ms. Appy suggested finding an appropriate way to request feedback, perhaps something consistent with what was done for the Amherst Town Manager.

**D. Accept Gifts (Regional School District)**—Ms. Gould made a motion to accept \$6,335.77 from the Stop and Shop A+ School Rewards Program for ARHS, \$300 from Peoples Bank for the ARHS AR[T] Project, \$790.96 from the Stop and Shop A+ School Rewards Program for ARMS, \$50 from Michael and Andrea Schaugency for the Ted Madden Scholarship, \$25 from Linda and David Excell for the Ted Madden Scholarship, \$1,000 from Barbara Mitchell for the Ted Madden Scholarship, \$2,000 from Robert Schumann for the Ted Madden Scholarship, \$10 from Winifred Ewing for the Ted Madden Scholarship, \$100 from WB Mason for the Backpack Project 2011, \$50 from The Rosenberg Committee for the Backpack Project 2011, \$84.29 from The Amherst Club for the Backpack Project 2011, \$50 from S. McKee (Amherst Chamber of Commerce) for the Backpack Project 2011, and \$27 from an anonymous donor for unspecified use by the schools. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

**5. Subcommittees**

**9:04 p.m.**

**A. Policy**—Ms. Luschen, Ms. Weilerstein, and Mr. Fonsh will continue to serve on the Policy Subcommittee with Mr. Fonsh serving as chair of the committee. Mr. Hood will attend meetings as a non-voting member when he is available.

**B. Budget**—Ms. Gould, Mr. Rhodes and Mr. Hood will continue to serve on the Budget Subcommittee. Ms. Gould will serve as chair of the committee and Mr. Hood will record minutes.

**6. School Committee Planning**

**9:07 p.m.**

**Items for Future Agendas**—Later Start Time Recommendation at second September meeting; Inquiry Group around Equity; Ms. Westmoreland will email School Committee members the full meeting schedule again

**5. Adjournment**

**9:10 p.m.**

Mr. Hood announced at 9:10 p.m. that the Committees will adjourn to Executive Session for the purpose of Contract Negotiations and will not return to open session. By roll call vote, the open session adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,  
Debbie Westmoreland

*Approved 9-27-11*

Good Evening,

I am Michael Aronson, an Amherst taxpayer.

I was forwarded an email Mr. Hood wrote on Monday August 8 expressing his opinion that it was - quote/unquote- "less expensive" to hire an outside attorney to litigate a Special Education matter even though the School District has a pre paid contract with an "In House" attorney.

I don't know where you learned math, Mr. Hood, but I can assure you that the \$3000 dollars you pay your in-house lawyer per month is less than *that* \$3000 **PLUS** the fees for an outside attorney hired to do the *very* same thing....

EVERY MEMBER OF THIS COMMITTEE should be up in arms about the administrative decision to waste precious education dollars in this way.

Mr. Hood, as Chairman of this committee, you should be making very public inquiries into why the decision to hire duplicate legal services was made.

Tell us, WHO is responsible for this violation of the public trust and why you consider it acceptable?

You should be asking - what other decisions *your* administrators are making that are equally improper.

Your negligence, and that of the administrator who made this decision is hurting our children and our community.

This is shameful, malfeasant, and terrible policy.

Parents who come to Amherst for their children's education, and pay handsomely in taxes for the privilege, are appalled at the tremendous waste this kind of decision represents.

Let us be clear, you have failed them.

Thank you for your time.

> -----Original Message-----

> From: Rick Hood <[hoodr@ARPS.ORG](mailto:hoodr@ARPS.ORG)> To: amherstac <[amherstac@aol.com](mailto:amherstac@aol.com)>

> Sent: Mon, Aug 8, 2011 3:10 pm Subject: Re: Legal services question

> Hi Larry,

There were three cases carried over from the transition between Dupere and MHLT. Two of the cases have reached conclusion and/or are awaiting the BSEA to issue their decision. The third case was a re-filing of a case where MHLT had already worked extensively on it during the FY11 school year prior to Dupere being appointed the new SE attorney. Probably this is the case you are referring to.

>Where MHLT was already deeply involved in a case it was thought best (and less expensive) to keep MHLT on it.

> Rick

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